

COLLECTION
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ONE YEAR BY FRANCES MARY PEARD

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

"Our life has not one link to cast away."

J. E. BROWN.

ONE YEAR;

OR,

A STORY OF THREE HOMES.

BY

FRANCES MARY PEARD.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1869.

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ONE YEAR;

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The first the action was repeated with an in-
 creased rapidity upon the floor, and overhead there was
 a rushing noise of party steps, a door opened, and a
 young man called down the stairs.
 In one little moment, Mahomet, I only wait to
 give him the word.
 His word. At this hour, What (Mahomet)

ONE YEAR.

CHAPTER I.

URSULE.

Petulant she spoke, and at herself she laughed;
A rosebud set with little wilful thorns.

'The Princess.'

"URSULE!"

No answer.

"Ursule!"

This time the name was repeated with an impatient tap upon the floor, and overhead there was a sudden rush of hasty steps, a door opened, and a young voice called down the stairs,

"In one little moment, Madame; I only wait to give Louis his soup."

"His soup! At this hour? What foolishness!"

"No foolishness at all, Madame," cried the voice angrily; "the poor boy is half fainting."

"Then I am to understand you do not descend to-day, Mademoiselle Ursule?"

"I cannot say, Madame; it must depend upon Louis."

"Upon Louis? By all means. *Bon jour*, Mademoiselle."

"*Bon jour*, Madame."

This little conference took place upon the staircase of an old dilapidated sombre house in Dieppe. It stood in the midst of the street, with shops on either side, and a dark archway for an entrance; the pavement was broken and painfully uneven, and on the north side of the archway a little door conducted you into the house. Nothing about the place excited the imagination, or brought up fanciful pictures of what might once have been there;—it was a common-place house, fallen into common-place decay; the passages were narrow and dismal, the rooms bare, the glass in the windows tinged with green. And yet, by some strange freak of the architect, it possessed one magnificent feature in a wonderful old oak staircase, ascending from a little flagged court, round which the house was built, so that its sides, protected by heavy black balustrades, were open to the air. The steps were broad and shallow; the oak panelling and massive rails, black

with age and rubbing, were carved with all manner of quaint, almost uncouth devices; and each flight ended with a little landing from whence, over the railing, you might look up or down as the fancy seized you.

Up, if you loved to follow the grotesque windings of the black staircase, on which the sunlights became golden, the shadows almost terrible in their gloom,—the solid balustrade at the top, the slightly overhanging roof, and then, with all its exquisite colouring condensed and deepened by this preparation, a few square yards of sky, of a blue too tender to dazzle, too intense to weary, too heavenly for anything on earth to be compared to it. Very often there were pigeons flying about the opening; sometimes they would perch upon the edge of the roof, and Ursule, standing upon her landing—the highest—would coax them out of their stately graces to come and pick up the crumbs she scattered for them. There was a pretty picture to look at then. The young girl leaning over the carved black railings, half in shadow, half in light, her slender throat curved back, her smiling face raised to watch the birds fluttering round the opening; over all, the unfathomable depth of sunlit blue. A few more shy advances, and with a soft rustle of wings the first grey pigeon flies down upon the balustrade, another lights on the girl's shoulder, a third follows, and, babbling and cooing to each other, Ursule and her

favourites flit in and out among the deep shadows overhead.

This, if you were fortunate, was what you might not unfrequently see, if you stood upon the landing of Madame d'Aurigny's floor and looked upwards for a little while. But, for those who cared to keep their eyes and their thoughts in the world below, there was another point of view in the contemplation of which they would probably be joined by Madame d'Aurigny herself. For while Ursule loved to gaze up at the sky, and the flickering lights, and her pearl-coloured pigeons, Madame d'Aurigny, when she stopped on her landing to take breath after the ascent, as instinctively cast down her eyes towards the glazed corner of the little room beneath, which served Sanson and his wife, the master and mistress of the house, for kitchen, *salon*, and bed-chamber in one: whence arose—Monsieur being in his way a gourmand—savoury whiffs of seasoned compounds which caused poor Madame d'Aurigny to close her eyes, shake her head, and inveigh somewhat bitterly to Ursule against those greedy lovers of self who care for nothing higher than the miserable pleasures of the table.

"Never be like such," she would say with half-pathetic eagerness, "never so degrade yourself. Imitate me, who have always resisted selfish indulgences, always sacrificed the flesh. And yet I have had my temptations in those bygone days.

What *pâtés*!—what *fricandeaux*! You, with your eternal soups and vegetables, and only an occasional chocolate *bon-bon* for consolation, know absolutely nothing of what a *fricandeau* may be. But it is vanity; it must all be renounced, child."

Upon which Ursule, who had no *fricandeaux* to renounce, would look at Madame and wonder vaguely whether by sacrificing the flesh it must grow so wrinkled and colourless as the wizened face before her. Threescore years and upwards set their mark more unmistakably upon a French than an English woman, to which must be added that Madame d'Aurigny had not only known many sorrows and some reverse of fortune, but had lived alone with her sad memories until she unconsciously multiplied them, and actually revelled in troubles which she had never experienced. She had her fits of vivacity, and her fits of depression. In the former she employed herself by going out to visit the little circle of acquaintances with whom she still kept up a ceremonious intercourse, or by bargaining in the market: in the latter she sat drearily at home, bewailed herself to Ursule, and inveighed with particular fervour against the odour of Monsieur Sanson's little stews. Madame was tall, gaunt, untidy-looking. Her white frizzly hair was arranged round her face in tiers of short horizontal curls. When she spoke, her eyes still sparkled keenly, but her eyebrows lifted her forehead into long ridged lines. She had

lived in the old house fifteen years; Ursule, her father and her brother, nine—more than half the girl's lifetime, for she was only seventeen, and they came to the Sansons' a short time before her mother died. Madame was *au premier*; the Lafons, *au second*. Madame, although, as she would tell you, by many heartrending circumstances reduced to poverty, had never dropped the aristocratic *de* which preceded her name and lifted her above the level of ordinary mortals. Jean Lafon, although calling himself artist, cared little in what level he found himself. Madame could not possibly know the family. Madame never once in all those long years had ascended *au second*. Madame shut her eyes to the fact that there were other lodgers in the house. But when a little brown sprite came dancing down the stairs at all manner of unexpected times, and, with the undaunted confidence of childhood, wished Madame a smiling "*Bon jour*," it was impossible to ignore her existence or to avoid making friends. Ursule was soon free of the first floor; and since that period Madame had alternately petted, scolded, entreated, quarrelled with, and in vain attempted to tyrannize over her. The girl was loving and compassionate, but of too wilful a spirit to succumb to her dominion, and utterly and immeasurably scornful over the superiority conferred by a *de*. It was not therefore to be wondered at that quarrels between the oddly assorted pair were frequent, and

that Ursule was in the habit of keeping angrily away from Madame's room, to the extreme discomfort of the latter, until, scolded into propriety by Louis, or smitten with sudden compunction at the idea of the desolation below, she would fly down the staircase into the cold bare room, always carefully designated by Madame d'Aurigny the *salon*, sure of the same scene meeting her eyes—the red brick floor partially hidden by little strips of carpet—the bed in its cupboard-like recess, curtained off from view—the great gilt clock, with fat Cupids supporting it, ticking monotonously on the chimney-piece—two pieces of modern French china on either side—and Madame, with a rigid and melancholy face, sitting sadly at the window, seeking distraction by watching the hairdresser's shop opposite, and the little crowd continually passing out and in.

On the evening of the day when the short conversation already related took place, Ursule found it thus. She received no greeting or notice of any kind, not so much as a look; but she knew Madame too well to expect it, nor, to tell the truth, was her penitence deep. She only shrugged her shoulders impatiently, began to hum a merry country *chanson*, and, snatching a brush from its hiding-place, energetically attacked the corners of the room, and presently raised a dust which was certainly set flying rather more extensively than was necessary.

Madame was quite conscious of her enemy's

tactics, and struggled hard to preserve her dignity. It was in vain. Fairly driven to desperation by the cloud that enveloped her, she rose up, and angrily shaking her skirts, exclaimed,

"Have done, then, with folly, Ursule! this is not a time to disturb me thus! In the morning, when I was absent, it would have been a suitable attention; but I desire that I may at least be permitted to pass my evenings in peace."

"Ah, *pardon!*" answered Ursule, pausing in her labour, and looking a pretty roguish picture, as she daintily turned back her cuffs, and stole a glance at Madame with sparkling eyes. "I am grieved to disarrange Madame, but she sees the state of the room; it is really a disgrace——"

"It should have been done this morning."

"This morning? ah, yes! But I had so much to occupy me this morning; Madame Paul sent for me, and Louis—poor Louis!—has been so suffering."

The mischievous expression faded out of her eyes, her voice became unconsciously sorrowful, her figure drooped: Madame grew interested in the change.

"I know the reason," said she, decidedly. "Yesterday he sat too long in the balcony. The sun was scorching, and I heard your voices there for hours."

"It may have been so," Ursule said wearily, letting the brush drop, the dust subside into fresh lodgments, and seating herself upon the low window-sill in her favourite attitude, her hands clasped round one knee. "But sometimes I think there always is something; and it is so little, so little that does it."

Madame was too sensible of the relief of having her young opponent at her feet, dejected, softened, requiring only sympathy to be completely subdued, to dare to push her advantage far; but she could not refrain from one slap.

"The young persons of this day have no prudence. They adopt their own ways, their own plans. They reject their elders' counsel."

"I am sure we reject no one's counsel," said Ursule, still sad; "on the contrary, it seems to me that we follow everybody's by turn. But yesterday Louis was so restless and uneasy in the room that at least it gave him a change to have the air in the balcony, and I remembered that you had warned me last week that the evening air was evil. What can one do? If one has not the sun, one must have the dew; if one has not the dew, one must have the sun! There is always something. And he seemed better; he had quite an appetite for the little cake good Madame Sanson brought up to him."

"Oh!" said Madame sententiously, "I am satisfied. That explains all. If you will allow the

Sansons to overwhelm him with their coarse cookery, no wonder that the poor boy is suffering."

Madame pulled some knitting out of a capacious pocket, and applied herself to its intricacies with an air of having satisfactorily disposed of the subject. Ursule broke into a merry laugh, her buoyant spirit in a moment shaking off the depression which had clouded it. "Their coarse cookery is very fine to us; we have had no experience to make us dainty in our tastes. You shake your head: ah, well, what would you have? One must taste to know. Besides which, to me Madame's dishes are delicious; only I cannot bear so much as to touch them when it is so good for Louis to have a change. But I must return to him directly," she exclaimed, springing up from her low seat; "and after all the room is not finished, Madame. Would you rather I waited until to-morrow? Really, the dust is as thick as all that," raising one hand above the other to show an appalling depth.

"Bah, bah!" returned the old lady, with impatience; "what has done will do; the dust makes no mischief, if only you will let it alone. However, if you must, to-morrow—yes, to-morrow, when I go to market. That old *cochon*, Michael, sold me eggs yesterday that were not fresh. To-morrow, child, dust everything, and make it tidy. Thursday is the Fête Dieu, and Madame Grignon and Madame Larousse come to me to see the spectacle from my

salon. *Ciel*, what a fête it will be! All the newly confirmed in their fresh white toilettes—soldiers, music, everything that can inspire us. Ah, you poor Protestants, what a dull religion they give you, who are called your priests! We shall sit on the balcony, and Madame Grignon, who is connected distantly with Monsieur l'Abbé d'O., assures me on the best authority that one of the stations will be exactly in front of this house, so that all the procession will be stopped, and we shall see it to perfection. It is not every one, after all, who has the advantage of living *au premier*; the position assists one to endure much—even the smell of Sanson's bad cooking. Of what are you thinking, Ursule?" Madame d'Aurigny added, patting her hand with unusual graciousness. "Some day, who knows? you too may live *au premier*."

"It was not of that I was thinking," Ursule answered abstractedly, "but of the fête. For the other, I do not wish it; I like the second best. It is nearer the sky."

"Nearer the sky! Is it possible!—do I dream! Do you talk of the sky, which is so common that everybody can see it! And this, after all the care, the pains, I have taken to form, to give ideas. I can do no more—I yield—I wash my hands of you."

"But you cannot dust your room without me," interrupted Ursule, merrily. "*Bon soir*, Madame; I

undertake that everything shall be as you like it for your friends, and I will bring down the great oak chair which stands in our room, so that you shall receive them like a princess."

"Ah!" said Madame d'Aurigny, mollified; "stay, Ursule——"

But the girl was already gone.

She ran gladly up the stairs—she was always glad when going back to Louis—and at the door she stopped, smiling. To ordinary eyes there was not much to smile over in the room itself; while not so formal in arrangement, it was even more shabbily furnished than Madame's down below; only the most necessary articles remained in it, and these—with the exception of one very handsome high-backed oak chair, which seemed to belong to the same date as the staircase—were of the roughest, plainest description. A curtain portioned off the little recess where Ursule slept, it is true; but, long ago, the last vestige of colour had been washed out of the flowered chintz which composed it. The glass in the windows was so green and uneven, that nothing looked natural which was viewed through its medium; and as to the floor, there was no attempt at covering the red bricks except at one spot, where reposed a tiny square of faded carpet.

Yet the room was far prettier and more interesting than Madame's *salon*, and contained certain points on which the eye rested with pleasure. Lean-

ing against the wall were a few pictures, one or two mere sketches daubed in with bright dashes of colour, but all in their way significant and powerful. One there was in particular which arrested the fancy, a long low painting of a sea view, wild and gloomy, as if it represented the gradual rising of a storm. There was no land, no ship, no human interest, and yet the picture was a poem. Piles of heavy clouds gathered ominously together; fierce sunset lights broke luridly out from the increasing darkness; the sea, answering to the movements overhead, was lashing itself into fury. But perhaps the chief strength of the painting lay in the feeling it conveyed of repression, as if, through all the visible stir, there was a holding back of worse things: the sunset lights had not yet died out, hope was not over; how would it end? Had Jean Lafon unconsciously pictured his own life? Who knows?

A heap of large waxy yellow and red bigarreau cherries were temptingly arranged in a green leaf upon the table which was drawn near a little low couch—Louis' resting-place. It was there that Ursule's eyes dwelt with a look of infinite tenderness. She thought her brother was asleep, for he lay quite still, this boy of sixteen, who, born a cripple, had passed through childhood without tasting the joyousness of a child's existence, and now was lengthening out—not growing up—to manhood, the same helpless burden as ever. His eyes were

closed, his face turned towards the door; one hand was under his cheek. Though the hazel eyes were hidden, you could see that the face was beautiful, the nose short and straight, the lips rather full, the chin round. Brown hair lifted itself a little from the forehead, and the long curved eyelashes were darker than the hair. Only the colouring and roundness of health was wanting, and even now the usual suffering look was veiled by a half smile flickering tremulously round the mouth. The next instant it broke out unrestrainedly, his eyes opened, and Ursule darted to his side. She knelt down, and laid her cheek against his.

"Thou hast had a good sleep, my Louis; I am so glad!"

"Not a sleep, but a day-dream. I have been a hundred leagues away."

"And left me behind?" Ursule said, with a little quick reproachful gesture. She could not endure that he should separate himself from her even in his dreams.

"We shall see. At all events, I have come back now, and I want to hear how you and Madame got on. Have you been good? Is she still angry with my poor soup?"

"No—yes—no; that is to say, she was angry, but I brought her round in a cloud of dust, and then it was all nearly undone again because I said I liked to look at the sky. However, do not be troubled;

she is not really vexed. I have promised to lend her the big chair. Oh, Louis!" Ursule jumped up and clapped her hands delightedly, "I have something to tell."

"Ah? And I too."

"Thou? Has Madame Sanson been up?"

"No."

"Not Monsieur, I know: Monsieur is too fat. Pierre Renait?"

"Not a creature."

Ursule pondered. "*Tiens*, I have it!" she exclaimed, presently; "a letter has come from our father."

"When he left us but yesterday, and I told you no one had been up! Do letters come of themselves, little wisehead?"

Ursule pretended to pout. "I don't like secrets," said she.

"*Eh bien!* find it out. Guess again. No? There, I give you warning I shall make my own bargain; you shall tell me your news, and perhaps I will tell you mine."

His sister pinched his arm, and called him a usurer. "I have a more generous spirit, and care not for conditions. The day after to-morrow is the great June fête; the principal stations will be in this street, and you will see everything to perfection. There! Last year—do you remember?—you were ill, and it was all lost on us."

"So the big chair is for Madame?"

"Yes; she has friends who will sit solemnly in the balcony and behold everything."

"Has she invited you?"

"How, I! To meet her friends! She called me a little Protestant. To tell you the truth, Louis," said the girl, drawing up her head proudly, "I care not greatly for being a Protestant except when they mock me for it, and then—I would not be anything else for the world."

"Madame has Protestant relations of her own?" said Louis, letting Ursule's doctrinal opinions pass for once without comment; "you have often told me so."

"Yes, there is her sister, and her sister's English son, Monsieur Clément Blunt. She talks of them so much; she hopes, I think, continually, that they will come and see her. Poor Madame! she says no good thing that ever she hopes for comes. That is terrible, Louis, is it not? Now, to me, it seems that so many good things come just when one wants them most, and does not expect to have them—when matters are at their worst, sometimes; and my father has been tiresome and horrid for ever so long—you need not shake your head, Louis, I must say it to somebody—then, all of a sudden, he takes a turn and works at a picture, sells it, gives me some of the money, and we can go on again. And when you are ill, and I am fretting because I have no-

thing nice to give you, up comes dear old Madame Sanson with her good-natured face, and just the very thing I want pops out from under her apron. Oh, it is wonderful! One has so many nice surprises in the world!"

Her brightness infected Louis; his eyes sparkled.

"Have you forgotten that it is I who am to give you a surprise this time?" said he, blithely.

"No, no, I have not forgotten that your secret is coming; I am wondering and wondering to myself while I talk. But it is to be very charming, remember. It is to be the best of all, because it comes from you."

Louis smiled gravely, and a little nervously. He put his hand under his pillow, and slowly drew out something which he placed in Ursule's hand. She looked at it in an ecstasy of wonder and delight.

It was a little picture, delicately painted in water-colours, of a young girl caressing her pigeons. One she clasped, and smoothed the soft feathers, while her head was turned towards another, which had just fluttered on her shoulder. It was not difficult to see who had been Louis' model. Shall I describe Ursule? It is time to do so; and yet hers was just one of those faces which it is almost impossible to realise by description, for the interest lay entirely in expression. She was not even pretty, yet she looked so as she stood with the flush of delighted pride upon her face, her lips slightly parted, her

grey eyes sparkling and tender; her whole countenance lit with sweet unselfish sympathy. It was pleasant to see the deep love evidently existing between the young brother and sister: she so entirely wrapped in him that no consciousness of who was represented in the little painting crossed her mind, only wonder at Louis' surprising genius; and he showing his affection in the care with which he had fashioned every fold of her simple dark dress, the wave in her hair, the ribbon bound round her head, the graceful poise of her slender figure, the little prettinesses which no stranger would have recognized. Ursule's voice trembled almost into a sob as she laid her hands upon his shoulders, and looked full into his eyes:

"Oh, Louis, is it your doing? Your very, very own?"

For answer he drew down her head and kissed her, and the two whispered gleefully to one another like a pair of little children.

"How clever! How beautiful!"

"Do you really like it?"

"Like it! Why, Louis, who could have done it better?"

"Ah, you see, who knows? I may do something yet."

"Has Pierre seen it?"

"No, no!"

"What will he say?"

And Ursule drew herself back once more to look at it, and said, after a long scrutiny, quite naïvely, "She has such a pretty face!" whereupon Louis broke into a peal of laughter so joyous and hearty, and unlike his usual quiet amusement, that good Madame Sanson downstairs stopped in her work, smiled for sympathy, and said to her husband, "Listen, Jules, *mon ami*, that is all your little cake."

Monsieur Sanson sighed.

"It was delicate," he said, "the flavour was ravishing, and—it was the last."

CHAPTER II.

LOUIS.

And I know full well, though I cannot see,
How the calmness falls over meadow and tree;
And the carven pinnacles, clear and high,
How still they stand in the quiet sky.

DER TOD ALS FREUND.

JEAN LAFON was an artist; that is to say, when he was a boy he had displayed a talent for painting, which, unfortunately, was sufficiently marked to prove an excuse for idleness. His mother loved him very dearly, and it is easy to build visionary castles for those we love. He used to talk grandly of the things he would do some day, and of it being not worth while to attend to little things meanwhile. Madame Lafon was ready to believe that she had in her son a great painter, who could leap, whenever he liked, to the highest point of fame. So also thought Marie Laget when she married him. When she died—eight years afterwards—she was content to pray passionately that her children might be kept from starvation. Dreams of fame fade quickly if

want stands gaunt and grim before the door, and Marie grew bitter when she lost trust in her husband. Had he honestly tried and failed, she would have comforted, and loved, and believed in him the more; but when success was in his power—when he used it sufficiently to gratify his own wants, his wishes, his pleasures, leaving her and the children to struggle on as they might—when selfishness was the only motive that stung him to exertion, Marie's love drifted away from him and centred in the children. For them she toiled day and night, caring nothing for her own suffering and failing health; and just when it seemed as if they could least do without her, she died—died, raising herself upon her elbow to give Louis one long, last, yearning kiss. Madame Sanson used often to speak of it in after-days, and never without tears. It was the ending of a life which, to the lookers-on who judged from the same level, seemed unlovely and failing, full of twists, unravelings, and rugged knots, but wherein, it may be, higher Eyes discerned the golden thread which beautified the whole.

It was very hard to her to go and leave her cripple-boy behind. Almost her last words were to impress upon Ursule the charge she left to her. And it was, in all probability, the remembrance of this which made the girl, childish as she was in other ways, so womanly, almost motherly, in her care of Louis. In this she had never once failed.

All the nursery ogres that ever existed were rolled into one by Madame Sanson when she wanted to find a comparison for what was likely to prove the behaviour of Jean Lafon at this juncture; but whether, as she persisted in affirming, he was possessed by the spirit of contradiction, or not, it is true that he certainly disappointed her expectations. He did not desert his children and leave them on her hands; but, on the contrary, he worked harder than he had been known to do before, for several months in succession. He finished off and successfully sold two or three original sketches, executed a commission for copying a famous opal-tinted Cuyp, with cows standing in a marsh by a broad canal; and, having satisfied his conscience by leaving money enough to support the children for a certain time, went off to indulge his love for a roving gipsy life. Ever since that day Ursule and Louis had lived on in the old house. Their father came home from time to time—they could never calculate when—sometimes bringing with him a finished picture, but more often painting after his arrival; providing Ursule with money at most uncertain intervals, and often reducing her to hard shifts. She had a brave, undaunted spirit, and never complained for herself: but for Louis she often shed bitter tears; and the delicate boy could not have struggled through it all, had not Madame Sanson with motherly kindness helped poor Ursule in her charge. As for Madame

d'Aurigny, although, to hear her talk, you would have supposed her to be the girl's protector, she was in truth but another burden. If any person had taken the trouble to set down the services on either side in a debtor and creditor account, Madame must have been credited with unlimited advice upon certain subjects, prominent among which stood the treatment of Louis (whom she had never seen), due contempt for Monsieur Sanson's cooking qualities, due respect for noble birth, and a just view of the importance of attaining a deportment which was distinguished by her with the title of *comme il faut*. Ursule, on her side, cleaned Madame's room, nursed her when she was ill, ran errands for her, and kept a human interest alive in the sad, desolate old heart.

It was not, as people say, by any means all love between them. Madame was sharp, and Ursule naughty with everybody except Louis: there was plenty of sparring and retort. "You seek occasion—you desire to enrage me!" Madame would exclaim, stamping her foot and letting her little grey curls quiver with excitement, and then out would pour Ursule's torrent of indignation. The wonder lay in the rapidity with which the storm would subside. Louis was general peacemaker. Whatever tempests vexed the house, from that clear atmosphere of patient love came down, no one quite knew how, all manner of soothing influences and kindly suggestions. I think it must have been the realization of

how great a burden he had to bear which made all the others feel their petty jars and frets so contemptible. His shrinking, sensitive nature, wanting the vigour that is necessary to lead others, still influenced them unconsciously by a pathetic power. Ursule's infinitely stronger character rested confidingly upon his. He possessed the rare gift of a quick, sympathetic imagination, that enabled him almost to identify himself with whoever claimed his interest, and the charm deepened a hundredfold as belonging to one who might so easily have absorbed himself in the contemplation of his own trials.

He never came down-stairs: it was suffering enough for him to move from one room into the other, or out upon the balcony; worse suffering often than Ursule could well bear to see. But he inherited his father's artist-eye, and made pictures out of everything; out of a flower growing on the steep, red-tiled roof opposite; out of the gloomy arched entrance and quaint gables of another house; out of the shop beside it, filled with creamy ivory carvings; out of the country-people passing below, with shrill-pitched, merry voices, on their way to the church, to the market, to the shops. In the keen, clear French atmosphere all the colours—red, blue, yellow—stood sharply out against the background of white houses; and on fête or market days, when the peasant-women poured in numbers into the old town, and chatted and gesticulated while their poultry cackled, black-

eyed girls in snowy caps, short petticoats, and stout shoes, carrying heavy triangular baskets of fish upon their backs, older women here and there among them, still preserving the picturesque dress of ancient Normandy, and conspicuous for their towering muslin caps, chains and crosses, bright kerchiefs, and striped aprons, Louis' bird's-eye-view of life was animated.

For other things, which he could never see, he depended upon Ursule's descriptions, which she had learned to render as faithfully as any landscape-painter. Nothing passed unheeded that might be stored up for Louis' amusement. Sometimes she would go to the cathedral, and return to him with quiet, grave pictures of the niched figures which looked peacefully down upon the world below, from out of their fretted canopies; or, better still, of shadowy nooks into which she had penetrated, sombre, solemn depths of dark stone where exquisite carvings were mouldering away, and the grass growing up unheeded round them. How patiently, how lovingly, skilled hands had toiled over these carvings, Ursule would think sadly; and for what? They were crumbling into decay, unseen, unpraised: even the sun was shut out from them, and all the careful labour was thrown away. She took back to Louis a pathetic picture of one or two such neglected corners, until he took quite an interest in them. He used to eagerly entreat her to go there, to pull up the tall weeds, to bring him back more exact descrip-

tions. In truth, although he could not have accounted in words for the attraction these hidden nooks possessed for him, it was that he unconsciously traced in them an allegory of his own life, and that it comforted him to hear how the great, simple-minded builders of old knew that every spot in God's house should be beautiful, though it might be that mortal eye would never rest upon it, and that, where no other worship could be offered, the stones at least should cry out His praise.

Besides the cathedral, there was the sea. Louis knew all about that. On stormy nights he could hear the distant wail of the waves. Ursule used to tell him how the cliffs looked grey and mysterious in the twilight, or brightened into rosy flushes when the setting sun left a glorious trail upon the waters. He liked to hear of the varying aspect of the green waves; whether they rolled in with a motion, calm, mighty, undisturbed, and suffered the fishing-boats to spread their tawny canvas and rock peacefully upon the surface; or whether they scattered them far and wide, the angry breakers hurling themselves against the pier, and whitening it with clouds of driven foam. He liked especially to hear how, in the midst of all this turmoil, a little black speck would appear out of the mist which mingled sky and sea together, and, drawing nearer and nearer, would hold on its undaunted way through the great waves and against the opposing wind, until the

steamer passed the pier into the harbour, and poured forth her freight of weary, pale-faced passengers. It was a great amusement to Louis when sometimes afterwards Ursule was able to point out to him the very people as they walked along sight-seeing, sure to spend a certain time in looking at the ivory carvings opposite.

All this Ursule could do, and she did it faithfully. But the part of Louis' existence, the want to which she could not minister, was an almost morbid longing to lessen the burden of his own helplessness. Ursule set Madame Sanson to scold him by the hour in vain. He acquiesced in all she said, but the longing remained as strong as ever. He could not bear to think of the dead weight he was to his sister; he knew much better than she thought how hard it was sometimes for her to get what she wanted for him, but he would not grieve her by showing that he knew; that would only, as he was well aware, add tenfold to her trouble. But this it was which often, more than pain, made him restless; this it was that led him to toil painfully over the paper and paints, or lumps of clay which Pierre Renait, the son of the famous clay-moulder, brought to him—toil till his hands trembled, and the hot flush came out on his cheek, and Ursule was ready to cry for vexation. How badly she behaved to Pierre on these occasions! It was all his fault—all! He had no sense, no discretion, no perception; he could not be trusted

for a moment to see what was destruction to Louis! The poor lad knew not what to do; for this little brown fury had before now been as gracious as possible to him when he had, by the very same means, succeeded in wiling away some hours of pain.

Pierre always mounted the stairs trembling; there was no knowing the mood in which he might find his queen. And it was a little hard when father, mother, and a hundred besides would have scouted with horror the idea of his falling in love with the daughter of Jean Lafon, the vagabond painter, to be so utterly scorned and made light of by the damsel herself. He thought mournfully that Ursule never seemed to consider him at all, except as a means of amusement for her beloved Louis. Nor did she. When he was entertaining, and Louis was bright, Pierre had a good chance of falling in for a smile, which set his heart bounding for an hour. If, unfortunately, Louis was weary and depressed, then Pierre was chased unceremoniously from the room, and left to make his way dismally down the stairs, and to meditate upon the uncertainty of women's tempers. It was all very naughty of Ursule; but then, as Madame d'Aurigny complained, her manners were as yet by no means *comme il faut*.

When, however, Pierre Renait ventured to mount to his friend's room on the morning after the conversation between the brother and sister related in the preceding chapter, he found Ursule radiant. She

flung down the work on which she was employed, and jumped up to meet him, clapping her hands.

"How long you have been in coming, Pierre!" she exclaimed. "I have wanted you ever so much."

"Wanted me, Mademoiselle?" stammered the young man, colouring from surprise and pleasure.

"It is partly owing to you, and it is delightful! Look at Louis; does he not look well? And he has done wonders! Show it to Pierre, Louis; he deserves really to see it."

"She thinks a great deal too much of it, Pierre," said Louis, apologetically; "it is a very little thing, and I remember you saw me beginning it. But you know I have done so little. Is there any chance? Will it do?"

"Do!" exclaimed Ursule with indignation.

But Louis was less sanguine. He watched his friend closely, with painful anxiety, aware of his own deficiencies, and jealous of the notion that Pierre might pretend to admire it for friendship's sake. He had not the least idea that there might be another reason to blind his eyes.

"Why, it is beautiful!" cried the young man, warmly; "it is Mademoiselle to the life. Louis, lucky fellow! you will make your fortune!"

Louis shut his eyes and sank back upon his pillows, content. Ursule's smile deepened. If Pierre had ventured to think differently, there is no know-

ing what would have become of him; but there was genuine honesty in his tone, and the girl triumphed.

"I told you so, Louis," she said; "but of course Monsieur Pierre is a better judge. And we have to thank him for much. Indeed," she added, turning to him with a pretty little air of dignity which was new to her, "we are very, very much obliged to you."

Pierre's head swam; such unwonted graciousness quite took away his breath; he felt as he had not done since he had the fever, five years before. Yet it seemed to him as if it only mounted Ursule on a higher pedestal, and left him further off than ever.

"If Mademoiselle would like," he said timidly, "I might assist her in offering the little picture to those whose opinion is better worth having. Many, as you know, come to my father about works of art; and although it is not our branch exactly, I—I think—I am sure it would soon find a purchaser."

"I do not want it to be sold," said Ursule, coming down from her heights and pouting a little. "I want to keep it."

"Do not listen to her," interrupted Louis eagerly; "but thank you a hundred thousand times, Pierre. Take it with you—yes, by all means—I think, oh, if you can bring me back a few francs, and let me feel that I—I have earned them!—Ursule, I shall not be a log upon you any more."

"If I might——" hurriedly began Pierre; he

was going to say that if he only might buy it himself it would be the choicest bit of treasure he had ever possessed, when Ursule interrupted him:

"I insist—Pierre, I insist that it is not sold to any one who cannot appreciate it properly, who is not charming. I will never speak to you again, if you let it go otherwise. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I understand you," said the young man, humbly.

"And you promise?"

Pierre hesitated. "I promise," he said at last, "that no one shall have it who will not value it with his whole heart."

"That is right!" exclaimed Ursule, gleefully. "My Louis, what would you do if you had not me to make conditions? And Pierre is really excellent; what can we do for him? *Tiens*, I have an idea! He shall see the fête to-morrow from our balcony. Madame d'Aurigny has her little party, and why should not we have our festivity above? You will come?—that is right. But I shall send you away now; Louis is tired, and must sleep. *Au revoir*, Monsieur Pierre: take great care of our treasure."

Pierre went away in a whirl of delight. She had never treated him so confidentially before, never had been so kind, never, he thought, looked so bewitching. He held his charge tight—Ursule and her pigeons, which he was never to part with, though

he spent his last *son* upon its purchase. Nevertheless, in spite of his head being turned, he had enough sense remaining to understand that she would not be satisfied with his being the owner. He went, therefore, at once to an old man who worked for his father, and occasionally executed commissions on his own account, who knew also something of the value of pictures, and would be able to give an opinion as to what—to ordinary mortals who did not know Ursule—would be the worth of Louis' maiden. He found Maître Moreau sitting in a stuffy little back room, engaged upon some delicate moulding, and in no good humour at being interrupted. He was surly mannered, and his greeting of Pierre was enough to daunt a less ardent inquirer. But Pierre in the presence of Ursule, and Pierre with the outer world, were very different beings.

"Good morning, Moreau; I want a word of advice."

"I could give you plenty, only you would not take it," muttered the old man, crossly.

"Who knows? Let's hear it, at any rate."

"Take off these fripperies," touching with his lean forefinger some little ornaments rather ostentatiously displayed on Pierre's watch-chain; "go home, learn to bake clay, and not to disturb people when they are occupied."

Pierre laughed. "Great thanks for small civilities. However, those are not what I require just

at present. Just look up, if you please, from that sticky stuff, and tell me for how much this little water-colour ought to sell. There," he continued, holding it at arm's length, and contemplating it with the deepest admiration, "if you are honest, you will acknowledge you have not seen so graceful a bit of work for a long time."

Moreau glanced up quickly for an instant under his shaggy eyebrows.

"I'll give you half-a-napoleon for it."

"Will you, indeed?" exclaimed the young man indignantly; "who told you that it was for sale?—to you of all people in the world."

"If it is not for sale," said Moreau, coolly continuing his work, "there is no occasion for asking me what it is worth."

"But there is occasion, I tell you. *Allez!* I shall lose all patience presently. Moreau," he went on, changing his tone, "oblige me by informing me what a connoisseur in these matters would pay for such another as this? Not this itself, you understand—for, as I have already said, it is not for sale—but one of the same style. Then I will depart, on my word of honour."

"Depart, then, in the name of all that is provoking! And as to your sketch, if you poke it under the nose of every fool you meet as perseveringly as you have poked it under mine, at the end of a

twelvemonth you may meet with one big enough to give you a napoleon for it."

"The old curmudgeon!" exclaimed Pierre, flinging himself out of the room indignantly. "But I know his ways, and if he offered me ten francs for it, it is worth twice that; I will take them twenty francs to-morrow. What will Ursule say? I must be careful; she is so quick and so proud that every time she looks at me I shall think she has found out my secret; and if she did, the storm would be frightful; I should be compelled to restore it. Her looks sometimes seem as if they would wither one up; and yet how gentle she can be! Louis has made her eyes here like dove's eyes, and so they are to him. But I have heard that women are always strange to those they like; I hope it is so, for," concluded poor Pierre, with a sigh, "she is strange enough to me at times. Yet to-day—who knows?—to-day may be the beginning: so courage, my friend, courage; nothing is to be done without that."

It is very easy work to call for one's weapons, but of no possible use if, when they come, they are allowed to slip out of one's fingers. That is just where Pierre's courage oozed away on the following morning when he mounted the oak staircase, with two little gold pieces clasped in his hand, and the picture safely locked away at home in a box. He began the ascent valiantly, two stairs at a time; and

then he was seized with mortal dread of the encounter, and of Ursule's eyes looking through him and bringing his little fraud to light; so that he dragged his steps as slowly after him as if he had been a criminal on the way to receive his sentence. Poor Pierre! Certainly his courtship was not running upon easy wheels. There was his mother, who had been reproaching him all the morning for deserting his own home on the day of the fête, and taunting him with his fondness for a little heretic, who had neither family, riches, nor even good looks to recommend her. There was his father, to whom nobody had ever dared to breathe a word of such monstrous behaviour on the part of his son; there was his married sister, who lectured like her mother, and the unmarried one, who made a mock at his confidences. There was Ursule herself treating him much as an eastern princess would treat a slave; and finally there was his own heart dragged in opposite directions. Pierre could only comfort himself with the idea that, with so many obstacles in the way, he was every day more closely approximating to the heroes of romance. He reflected what they would have done under the circumstances. Having arranged his hair very carefully before starting, it was not convenient to make any frantic attempts at tearing it, and he could only relieve himself by a tremendous thump upon the chest, which certainly had not the effect of making him feel more comfort-

able when he found himself in the room with the brother and sister.

It was Louis' turn to welcome him. Ursule was in the balcony, leaning over the railing, and watching the preparations in the street below.

"You are just in time, Pierre," said the boy with a smile. "I want to be helped out to see the gay sights which Ursule reports. Ursule, here is Pierre."

"So I hear," said the girl carelessly, without turning her head. "Good day, Pierre."

She was in one of her moods—Pierre knew it in a moment by her attitude; but the talisman he held in his hand gave him unusual confidence. He knelt down by Louis' couch. "See here, my friend," he said in an under-tone, "are you content with your earnings?"

Louis looked at him with open eyes.

"Mine, all that!"

"You are pleased?"

"Twenty francs!"

"What are you two whispering about?" said Ursule, standing on the window-sill. "Do you not know that it is very rude to whisper? Well, well, no fine excuses; do not flatter yourselves I care about your secrets. How could you tear yourself away from your gay friends, Monsieur Pierre?—you have a better view from your own apartments."

"Mademoiselle forgets, perhaps, that she invited me," said Pierre, confused, mortified, and piqued, all in one.

"No, I remember; but I certainly never thought you would have come."

"How silly you are, both of you," interrupted Louis impatiently; "and, Ursule, all this time you ought to be thanking him. See!"

"Ah, he has sold the picture already;" and Ursule clapped her hands gleefully: "think of that! Why, I never gained money like this."

"How quickly you have got it—so much too! Pierre, is it really true; is it all right?"

The guilty Pierre coloured and stammered; but, as his danger, so his protection came from the quarter where he least expected it. Ursule answered for him tenderly.

"My Louis, you will always distrust yourself. I knew how it would be; I knew what your beautiful little painting was worth. But, Pierre, I vexed you just now when you have been so good. You did not heed it, did you? You know how my tongue gallops away with me; you ought to pity me, indeed," she continued with a comical little shrug, "for what am I to do? When I am cross, I can't scold Louis, and it is so stupid to scold oneself."

"You should never do that," said Pierre, with a little blundering attempt at gallantry.

"No? Well, I am not so sure; but it is the pleasantest doctrine. Come," she said, shaking off her momentary gravity, "we must lead out Louis. I hear the music in the distance."

Between them, the boy was half helped, half lifted, to the chair which his sister had put for him, and the three ensconced themselves in the little iron balcony to watch for the approaching procession—Pierre holding a great umbrella so as not only to shade Ursule, but conceal himself, and fervently hoping that no busy friends below would look up, recognise, and report to his father the reason why he had deserted his mother's guests.

Ursule's feelings on this fête-day were a mass of mingled sunshine and shadow. The day was delicious, fresh, keen, and sunny. Louis was well—unusually well, and in his highest spirits. Their worldly prospects, with this altogether unexpected and, to them, apparently inexhaustible source of wealth opening out, were peculiarly prosperous. Why was it not all sunshine? She had intended that it should be, and yet, foolish child, I am almost ashamed to write it of her, it sounds so naughty and discontented, the truth must be told, that she was annoyed because Madame d'Aurigny had not invited her to her reception in the *salon*. She wanted very much to know what ladies talked about to one another. She had led a strangely independent, unconventional life, which had at least left her ignorant of the thou-

sand wearisome common-places which make a part of every person's existence. In her simplicity she wanted to know about them. She would have liked, only for one ten minutes, to have sat humbly behind the three old people down-stairs, and heard how they spoke in the unknown world of which she thought so often; and she was very fierce with Madame for denying her this pleasure.

"May I come down, Madame, just to see your friends?" she had said innocently, when she had worked through the early morning, shaken and dusted and vigorously furbished up the old things in Madame's apartment, and dragged the heavy great chair down the stairs, bump, bump, at every step.

All this she had done, and then she asked for her crumb of reward.

"But no, certainly," Madame said, without a touch of compunction in her voice. "It would not be *comme il faut*," she had gone on to explain. She, the poor artist's daughter, could not be invited to meet Madame Grignon and Madame Larousse, who had once moved in a circle of society so high that it was not possible for Ursule even to reach it in imagination. "I should not hurt them," the girl said, defiantly; and she had gone away with indignation in her heart. It was this strange worldly problem, which had never before come in her way, that

troubled her thoughts as she sat silent under Pierre's umbrella in the balcony. She was not good enough to meet Madame's friends. But why? The young republican frowned and bit her lips at the idea of the balcony from which she was shut out—the balcony down below, in which the three old women, faded and wizened, sat clinging to the shadow of their fancied dignities and solemnly eating chocolate. It was far more pleasant to look at the group over their heads. Ursule's graceful little lithe figure in the unfailing dark dress, it is true, but with snowy collar and cuffs to freshen it, and the ribbon fillet round her head; Pierre, dark-eyed, sallow, animated; and the pale earnest face of the lame boy, with watchful eyes, keenly seeking a new excitement; all set off by the bright bit of scarlet cloth which, Protestants as they were, good Madame Sanson insisted upon hanging over the balcony. Some of the neighbours, standing at the door of their houses, looked up, smiled and nodded with a good-humoured shrug at sight of Pierre, who, reddening as he caught their glances, kept back as far under the shadow of the umbrella as he could, while Ursule, equally unconscious of him and of them, clasped her hands upon the balcony railing, and looked out with eyes which were trying to pierce that new problem which the world had just placed before her.

The brilliant procession came slowly down the street, pausing every now and then at the different

stations, the altars decked with green boughs which had been erected in its course. There were soldiers, and banners, and canopies of bright fluttering ribbons carried by young girls; there was a body of the newly confirmed, the girls in their white dresses and veils; there were the ecclesiastics in their gorgeous many-coloured vestments; and with the guns, and the music, and the moments when all the bystanders simultaneously knelt in the street, it could not fail to be impressive. Louis watched it intently, more intently than either of his companions, and sank back with a sigh of relief as the last straggler disappeared down the street and Madame Sanson came bustling into the room.

“Was there ever such a fête? Did you think there could be anything half so beautiful upon earth? That little fat man next monseigneur waddled frightfully, it is true; but then what would you have?—they cannot all be angels. Ah, I remember going to a fête myself, all in white and lovely. They would not have me now, though I flatter myself I am a great deal better inside than I used to be. All the same, that will not serve for the angels down below here: one must have a figure and a complexion to make any show among them. And there was that silly little Annette, with her wreath all awry. Gabrielle Drouet was the most charming of them all—not a hair out of place, not a fold disturbed, and moving like a queen. I called Sanson

to see it; but the soup was just simmering, and he would not leave it even for a moment. What will become of him?—that is the question that rests in my throat like a bone. What will become of him,” continued Madame Sanson, puckering her rosy round face into as grave an expression as it could be brought to assume, “if he cannot leave his cooking when all the holiness in our town is passing by? It is frightful! What dost thou think, little one?”

Ursule was still leaning over the heavy iron railing, and Madame Sanson took it for granted that she was absorbed in tracking the course by which the passing splendour had disappeared. She was the more petrified when the girl, without turning her head or changing her position, answered pettishly,

“I think he was quite right.”

“Ursule!” said Louis.

In a moment she was kneeling by his side. “I can’t think what has got into me to-day,” she said penitently; “I am always saying what is wrong. Dear Madame, I know it is beautiful to you: I did not mean to vex you. I will go and preach to Monsieur for an hour, if you would like it. But, my Louis,” laying her brown cheek against his white one, and whispering, “it does not satisfy me. Is it wicked, do you think, to be different from other people? Every one else looked so pleased.”

“I thought it beautiful,” said the boy, with a sigh.

"And so it must have been. It is all my fault; and these troublesome fancies, which will come, come. You don't have them because you are good, and when I am quite close to you they fly away from me also. Hush! you are looking tired; we will lift you in."

CHAPTER III.

ON THE QUAI.

We live not in our moments or our years;
The present we fling from us as the rind
Of some sweet future.

R. C. TRENCH.

THREE days after the fête, Madame d'Aurigny and Ursule held a grave conference in the *salon* of the former lady.

Louis, patiently lying on his couch up-stairs, wondered to what it could relate, since it had been heralded by certain signs of importance which were quite unprecedented. Madame Sanson had ascended the black staircase as the bearer of a small elegantly folded missive, in which Madame d'Aurigny prayed Mademoiselle Ursule Lafon to do her the favour to descend, she being desirous to consult her upon an affair of moment. Ursule went off into a fit of merry laughter, when with some pains she had succeeded in deciphering this formal document; Madame Sanson, on the contrary, generally full of con-

tempt for her lodger's little weaknesses, fidgeted, looked grave, and finally scolded Ursule roundly for her want of proper respect.

"But she sees me every day: why should she take all this trouble?"

"That is nothing to thee. People do not take trouble without reason; leave that to her. Since she desires it, be serious and steady."

She was so evidently anxious on the subject, that Ursule schooled herself into sobriety, and went down-stairs prepared, as she whispered to Louis, to drop three unexceptionable curtsies, and not speak unless she was spoken to. But, in spite of her words, the girl could not help feeling a little curious, and Louis still more so. He and Madame Sanson remained in the room together after Ursule had obediently descended, his old friend sitting with her mouth resolutely pursed up, as if the secret were ready to fly out of it at a moment's notice. Perceiving this, he abstained from questioning, and went on sketching after some scarcely formed fancy with a bit of charcoal which he held in his hand. He had passed a night of suffering, and dark rims round his eyes made them look unnaturally large. Madame Sanson could not withdraw her own from the calm pure young face, and with her head still full of angels would have been scarcely astonished to see him transformed into one before her. She had always stoutly maintained, to the intense scandal of

the more orthodox among her friends, that he was as good as any saint; but, this afternoon, she placed him among the angels. He meanwhile, quite unconscious, was meditating in a quiet orderly way—which, partly from natural temperament and partly from the long discipline of suffering, was as unlike as possible to his sister's wayward, roving imaginings—upon Ursule and the restlessness she had lately displayed. Thinking it just possible that Madame Sanson might throw light upon the subject, he asked her whether she had noticed it. The old woman was terribly taken aback by this question, which placed her secret in serious jeopardy.

“What is that you say—restless? Well, well, it is possible: girls are often so. It fatigues them to be always staying and moping in the same place. She wants a change; she ought to go away for a little distraction.”

“Go away!” repeated Louis, with a shiver, “go away from me!”

“Yes, yes,” said Madame quickly, “for a little time, you know, that is all. What will you do when she wants to get married? A young girl like her won't be content to live up here always. Perhaps that may be at the bottom of her contrary ways now.”

Louis laughed out at this, a boyish laugh of disbelief.

"No?" said Madame, sagaciously. "Well, well, we shall see, we shall see; stranger things happen. Now, I could tell you something about something which would surprise you—there, as if I had not as nearly as possible let out all Madame's intentions! Ah! what is coming to me. It keeps dropping out from my mouth as if I had a mouthful of peas; and in a general way, though I may be an old fool, it is certain no one can accuse me of over-talking. I must descend, I must indeed, or it will be out before I know it, as surely as a chick from the shell."

"No, no; sit there, where I can see you, and you need not speak much. Only tell me—ought Ursule to go away? Am I selfish?"

Madame Sanson rapidly nodded her head in answer to the first question, and shook it with greater vehemence at the second—the only means of expression which she felt remained to her.

Louis' brows contracted, and the sweet young face looked troubled. He half raised himself on his arm, and spoke rapidly and with some agitation:

"Dear Madame Sanson, you know our circumstances; no one knows them better than you who have been so good to us. And you know about young girls, what is right, what they should be. For me it does not matter; wherever I was it would be the same: I can but lie here and be a burden, I

suppose. But we won't speak of that—you shake your head; and we will conclude that I have nothing to do with the affair—only about Ursule. Ah, Madame, it has been so hard for her to have no mother, no father even,” added the lad in a hesitating voice, “and to be sacrificed here to me. How can she learn all the things women ought to know?”

“She is too independent for a woman; that is true,” returned Madame Sanson, continuing to shake her head, as if by this means she had found a vent for her feelings.

“And yet, how can she be otherwise?”

“Mademoiselle ought to be with other women;” said Madame, decisively.

“It is good, therefore, for her to be with Madame d'Aurigny,” Louis said, after a moment's pause. Then with a half smile, “But she will not submit herself.”

“Her spirit will be broken some day, without doubt; it is not intended that a woman should have spirit.”

“No? My poor Ursule! Must it be broken? Should it not rather be curbed and trained?”

“All very fine, Monsieur Louis, but who is to do it? You can make those little bits of paper take what colouring you please; but a girl's heart!—that's another thing.”

"I know," said the boy sadly. "But, dear Madame, think of all she has had against her! Who has she to guide her? How can I help her? What will become of her when——"

Louis stopped. Madame looked at him reverently.

"One would think you were ever so much older," said she.

He did not answer her for a moment; then it was to say with a faint smile, "Perhaps my life is gathered into fewer years."

"She won't be forsaken," said Madame heartily, the tears standing in her kind old eyes; "the good God will take care of you and of her to the end, never doubt it: you might be Protestants fifty times over before they would get me to believe anything different. There now, don't talk any more, but try to go to sleep. I hear Sanson calling me, and I must go down all those back-tormenting stairs. How I wish we had a nice compact little staircase instead! Don't be thinking yourself into a headache; there will be good in the end for all you poor young things, heretics or not," added the old woman in a panting whisper as she descended the stairs, taking each step heavily with the same foot, "Saints preserve us, what would Père Roget say if he heard me!"

Louis did not obey his old friend's injunctions, and the dark shade under his eyes grew darker, as

he thought, thought, thought of Ursule, her faults and her loveliness. Pain and weariness had been the teachers sent to train his mind when of other training there was little. Long ago, young as he was, life had stood out before him as no problem, but part of a great whole—something not only to be accepted, but used. No one, not even Ursule, knew what the patience had cost him, which appeared by others to be worn so easily that it scarcely seemed like patience at all, but rather perfect contentment. No one knew how, through all the weariness and depression of pain, hope would continually spring up with some of the vigour which is inseparable from boyhood—how resolutely the brave young spirit had striven to put it by, to wrestle with his longings, to fit himself to the cross, and to accept it as a blessing. Ursule believed there was never any one so good; but, with all her love and admiration, it seemed to her that she and Louis could never look at life from the same level. To her it was like a veiled beautiful figure standing in the distance, with a smiling face and a lap full of treasures, holding those bright future years which were to come dancing and go out dancing, to make room for others only more beautiful still. And though she longed vaguely to be good, and liked good people and good deeds, it was a dreamy kind of longing, very far removed from any real perception of what that goodness should be, of the

daily struggle, the self-denial, the patience, the thankful heart. Temper and patience failed often enough now, when some little passage at arms with Madame crossed her will, and she scarcely professed to be dutiful to her father. She held her religion because it was the religion of the family; but, as far as any higher motive went, she would as soon have held anything else, and her taste preferred the bright and gorgeous ceremonial of the Church of the country to the cold and unadorned service held once a week in the "Temple." Yet, though so much in her character seemed anchorless, her nature was not one to be very readily led. She was somewhat reticent in her attachments, and jealous of the smallest attempt at coercion. Loving, warm-hearted, generous, faithful, and true, she was also wilful, proud, passionate, and impatient, and as yet deficient in those principles which only could give hope that the brighter side of her character would in time predominate.

Louis' meditations came near some of these conclusions—painfully near, it seemed; for with a sigh he passed his hand over his forehead as if his task had been too heavy for him, and lay languidly back, feeling relief in the soft summer air which stole in at the window, cool and refreshing, from the sea. Without the breeze the day would have been oppressively sultry. There was a drone of insects, an occasional rumble of a cart, a suppressed

murmur of street sounds. Through all these he began to detect a high-pitched note or two, gradually becoming more shrill, which assured him that the interview down-stairs was not altogether of a peaceful nature. He listened as intently as he could to the unintelligible sounds. A quarrel between Madame and Ursule was, as has been said, no uncommon event; but he felt unreasonably impatient at its happening now, when he had just been longing for Ursule to be more gentle with Madame. By-and-by he fancied that the voices grew more composed; nevertheless it was evident that an altercation of some kind had taken place, and though he roused himself to give his unfailing smile of welcome to Ursule when, more slowly than usual, she came up the stairs and into the room, his face wore an anxious and wearied expression which she perceived in a moment.

She did not, however, at once allude to it, but asked what had become of Madame Sanson.

"She stayed as long as she could."

"She has tired you, then, Louis?"

"Not at all," said he, putting on a comic air of dignity; "we talked philosophy, Madame and I, and it was very improving."

Ursule shook her head. "When I go away from you, everything goes wrong."

"Oh, the vanity——"

"No, no; it is as I say, is it not?"

She spoke so imploringly that Louis glanced wonderingly in her face. He put his thin hand into hers.

"There is no need for me to tell you, my Ursule, that with you here everything is better."

"I said so, I said so," exclaimed she, laughing and crying at once. "We will always be together; no one can place your pillows like me; no one can read or do anything; no one shall!"

She fluttered about him as she spoke, putting some of her words into practice, but so absently that Louis underwent a good deal of discomfort in the process, and would have preferred his pillows being left as Madame had arranged them. He had not the heart to say so, however, and patiently bore the infliction—the more so, because every moment he expected something to be told him which might explain her disjointed words and actions; and she was at all times so ready to pour her little confidences into his ear, and to treasure the veriest trifles for his amusement, that it seemed unnecessary to question her. Nevertheless, to his wonder, she said not a word about the conversation down-stairs, but rather seemed by a restless flow of little inconsequent speeches, and by an apparent incapability of sitting still, to be bent upon warding off any reference to the subject. Louis watched and waited until he felt almost a shrinking difficulty in touching upon what she so persistently avoided.

"Ursule——" he began, at last.

"Hark! did you hear anything? I must run down-stairs and see whether Madame does not want me."

She was gone before he could stop her; and when she came back it was in a great bustle, to say that she was going as far as the harbour to fetch something for Madame. Louis was not to be put off again. He caught her by the sleeve, held her fast, and asked with an amused face whether her going at once was of such importance.

Ursule's truthfulness barred her from an evasive answer.

"As to that—no; but I have really promised to go there this afternoon."

"Well, you shall go, but not this very moment. I have never heard why you were summoned with all that ceremonial to Madame, and I am frightfully curious."

Louis watched for an answer in vain, for his sister stood silent.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked anxiously.

"No, no, indeed!"

"Only you would rather tell me nothing about it. Is it so, Ursule?"

She glanced quickly at him to discover whether he was hurt by her silence, but meeting only a look of unbroken trust, said quietly,

"I do not know how I can ask it, but it is true

that I shall be very grateful to you if you will not say anything to me. Madame wanted to ask a question, and—and I answered it; that really was all."

She spoke in a constrained, measured voice, very unlike herself; but she could not have done otherwise. She had shared every thought with Louis since babyhood, until now, and she was sufficiently unreasonable to feel sore and annoyed with both Madame d'Aurigny and their good old landlady, for having plotted together the little scheme which, she was ashamed to remember, had seemed for a few moments so bright and enticing. Louis answered hesitatingly,

"But—you did not quarrel with her?"

"No; why?"

"I thought your voices sounded loud.

"Only Madame's. She was vexed," said Ursule, more frankly than she had yet spoken; "but she meant to be kind."

"Then you thanked her?"

"O Louis, you pay so much attention to my conduct with Madame! How do you know there was anything to thank her for? Well, yes, I did. But I am not going to answer questions, I tell you—not even looks. I am going to the *quai* for a little fish for Monsieur, and all you are to do meanwhile is to forget every single thing about this

afternoon, and to imagine you have spent it in sleeping."

Louis smiled, a weary, puzzled smile, and her heart smote her as she ran down the stairs. Madame Sanson pounced upon her from the little glazed apartment below. She was in a flutter of indignation, which entirely prevented her hearing anything Ursule might have to urge in defence, and scarcely allowed herself time to speak intelligibly.

"Such folly—such ingratitude—such waste of opportunities! I would not believe Sanson when he told me. Is it true? No; I will not believe it. Do you know what it is you are throwing away?—and all that I have gone through."

Ursule had no opportunity of answering, but at this last sentence she drew herself up indignantly. Madame was not advancing her cause.

"I said so much for you—I gave her no peace" (Madame did not say that she had, moreover, promised to advance whatever money was required for the girl, but it was the truth); "it is too provoking of you! I can't believe you understand to what you are saying no. You have never been away: you don't figure to yourself the delights—the movement, the gaiety at the railway station, the trains and the passengers. Should I not like to be always going backwards and forwards! When I make a journey of the kind—it is not often, but when it does occur, I say to Sanson, "Ah, Jules, *mon ami*,

this is different, this is life;’ one is on good terms with all the world. And you, you will not go! Such a paradise of a country; such a garden of fruit-trees; such streets, and shops, and factories at Rouen! You will not go? It is inconceivable.”

Madame was thoroughly put out and annoyed. For a length of time Madame d’Aurigny had been in the habit of indulging in vague dreams about a little journey into the country. A relation of hers was married to an avocat at Rouen, and had more than once asked Madame to spend a short time there with her. She was half inclined to go, and half terrified at the prospect of the undertaking; and it was Madame Sanson who had first thought of Ursule’s going as her companion, and then had really given her no rest until she wrote to the avocat’s wife and obtained a ready answer and hospitable extension of the invitation to Ursule—Madame d’Aurigny thinking that she would thus obtain a companion who would take a great deal off her hands upon the journey, and Madame Sanson agreeing privately to pay the girl’s expenses, while, apparently, the patronage rested in the hands of her first-floor lodger.

And Ursule had absolutely refused!

I am not sure that there can be anything more annoying to kindly-natured people than to have their pet schemes for the good of some one in whom they are interested upset by the obstinacy of the person himself. It is such a gratuitous hindrance. Other

obstacles they will meet with their accustomed good humour; but this is unpardonable. Madame repeated in a tone of the utmost irritation,

"You will not go!"

"Dear Madame, I cannot."

Ursule was leaning over the back of a chair, with her face turned away from her old friend; but something in the tone of her voice struck the latter, and made her go up to her, take her head in both hands, and turn it to the light. A tear twinkled in each eye.

"Ah-h-h!" cried Madame, triumphantly, instantly dropping into the chair, with all her good humour restored. "Now I begin to see. You would like to go after all; to be sure, to be sure, that is as it should be. I always run my head against a post when, contrary to my own convictions, I listen to Sanson, who is a good man in his way, but without discernment. And now we will come to the inside of the matter. You wish to go, I wish you to go, Madame wishes you to go; what more can be needed?"

Ursule's eyes flashed indignantly round upon her.

"Is Louis not to be thought of?"

"And what possible harm can come to him?" answered Madame calmly. "Am not I here? And should I not take care to see more to his comfort if you were absent? Bah, bah! if that is all, we shall do well enough."

The girl shook her head.

"I acknowledge that I should like to see all the fine things you tell me about, for they must be beautiful," she said, simply; "but it is of no use. Louis and I have never been separated; I cannot leave him."

"Now you will enrage me again," said Madame, casting up her hands; "and if Sanson returns from his promenade and finds me out of temper, nobody knows what may happen. Answer me one question, What does the poor boy himself say to all this fuss?"

"He? He does not know."

"You have told him nothing?" said the old woman in shrill astonishment.

"But no, certainly! Why, you know Louis by this time; you know he would fret himself into a fever if he thought he was the cause of my not going. I would not have him learn it for all the world."

"But how could you help it?—was it not very hard to keep counsel?"

"Not so very," said Ursule, laughing; "the tongue need not say all that the heart contains."

"It says a great deal more sometimes, as to that, Mademoiselle. But you may rest assured that I shall tell him at the first opportunity, and see what he says to these ridiculous ideas,"

Ursule put her hands upon her old friend's shoulders.

"You will do nothing of the kind," she said, looking steadily at her with eyes from which every trace of sadness had vanished. "Until to-day I never knew you could be cross and unkind. I say solemnly that, if you tell Louis one word of the matter, I will never speak to you again—never, never, never! Think of that! What would become of you, I should like to know, if you had not me to tease you? I will not hear another word; but instead of my going away, you and Monsieur shall come to a little feast with us to-morrow, if Louis is well. You will; will you not? And you will show me the way to mix Monsieur's favourite salad. Do not fear; Louis' cleverness is making us quite rich, and, remember, you have promised!"

"What have I promised?" soliloquised Madame, arranging a sort of loose, flapping concern which decorated her head, and had been seriously disarranged by Ursule's parting hug. "Do what one will, that is a terrible child for always having her own way."

Ursule sped along as if her errand engrossed all her thoughts, nodding gaily to such of the shopkeepers as, tempted by the bright beauty of the afternoon and that instinctive love of open-air enjoyment which belongs to the French people, were lounging or sitting at the doors of their shops; but not lingering to exchange greetings with any of

them. They had known her since childhood, and were indulgent of the free, independent ways which they would not have permitted in their own daughters; though, to do her justice, however impatient of restraint she might be, not a word of blame as to unmaidenly conduct in speech or action had ever been imputed to her.

She went to the *halle*, bought the fish destined for Monsieur Sanson's consumption, and emerged on the side of the building facing the quay. Once having executed her commission, her hurry seemed to evaporate, and she loitered near the brink of the harbour, watching a ponderously built lugger being hauled in to discharge her contents. Clumsy and ugly as the vessel looked, even under the last rays of a gloriously setting sun, which not only made the grey clouds radiant, but touched the most ordinary objects with grand effects of light and shadow, there was a shade of romance in the name carefully painted on the stern—the “Jeune Marguerite,” that took Ursule's fancy. Wondering who was the “Jeune Marguerite,” how long the pretty name had clung to the battered old vessel, whether the neatness with which it had evidently been but lately repainted spoke of hope fulfilled, or hope deferred, or sad remembrance, her thoughts went back by their usual inevitable sequence to Louis. Inheriting something of her father's artistic genius, she gathered in a moment all the principal points of the busy scene

before her for his benefit: the long, sharp shadows on the dusty road—the quaint red-tiled roofs flaming under the sunbeams—piles of cordage—bales of goods—mountains of baskets—groups of gesticulating sailors, in caps of vivid scarlet—green water lapping ceaselessly under the discoloured wall—boats fidgiting round the larger vessels—the “Jeune Marguerite” lumbering wearily alongside. Three women standing near her, with snowy caps and bright brass milk-cans, were comparing notes upon their fortune at the market; a little child, belonging to one of the number, feasted upon a great handful of cherries. Ursule began to sing softly to herself; the elder women were too much engaged to hear it; but the child stopped eating, listened, and finally threw her a cherry for a reward. She would not come nearer, however, though Ursule smiled and beckoned; but, as soon as the song ceased, returned to her occupation of cherry-eating. Ursule added the trim little creature, with her round cheeks and eager eyes, to her picture for Louis, thinking that, if she could make him see the easy, childish attitude and the dangling fruit, he might contrive to sketch a likeness.

Then the thought forced itself upon her against which she had been fighting all the afternoon—how much that was new and beautiful she might bring back to interest him if she went away for that week’s holiday. She was fierce with herself for the

very fact of having to battle with the longing at all; frightened at the force with which it returned upon her. In these days, when comparatively the quietest lives have in them a degree of movement unknown in old times, it is difficult to conceive an existence so uneventful as hers had been. It seemed to her that to make this projected expedition would be to enter upon a world of delight. Imagination painted it in the most glowing colours; to no one on the earth could Rouen prove so charming as she pictured it. Until now she had not been able to think the matter quietly over by herself. When she had descended into the *salon*, it was to be received by Madame d'Aurigny sitting in dignity in the borrowed great oak chair, with her hands folded before her, and so full of the importance of the communication she was about to make, that Ursule's small stock of patience had difficulty in meeting the demands made upon it. It was long before she could gather more than that a great favour was about to be bestowed upon her, and this she was suspicious would resolve itself into one of Madame's peculiarly one-sided favours.

But as, little by little, the project was disclosed, she was lost in a perfect maze of overpowering delight. It seemed as if a bit of the curtain which shut out a beautiful unknown world were to be lifted. She was very young, very inexperienced, and novelty meant enjoyment. Two or three mo-

ments of this dream of happiness, and she remembered Louis. How could she have forgotten? What had she been thinking of? Down went the curtain again; a chill crept over everything; her face, which had been so radiant and joyous, grew blank. Madame marvelled why, in the midst of broken words of thanks, she suddenly stopped and shook her head; but when she gathered that she was absolutely declining the proposal, her indignation knew no bounds. It was no wonder that the shrill, angry ravings penetrated to Louis overhead. Instead of touching Ursule, it made her bitter, feeling, as she did, as if the offer had been only a mockery; angry, too, with herself for having for an instant allowed herself to dream of leaving Louis, and still more for feeling that she actually wanted to go, and that the giving it up was a sharp disappointment. It was tender, unselfish love which made her realize what it would cost him to let her go, and heroically turn away from her bright visions; but poor Ursule was very far from possessing the self-control that was needed to bear patiently with Madame's words. Reverence for age, which would have helped many young girls, seemed entirely wanting or undeveloped in her, and the scolding went on so vehemently on either side that it was a wonder their quarrels were ever made up. This last had ended in a sort of truce. Madame exhausted her words, and Ursule felt she had been ungrateful. Then came her talk with Louis, her lec-

ture from Madame Sanson, and her meditations upon the quay.

At last she shook herself out of a kind of dream, and turned homewards. The women and the little child, the milk-pails and cherries, had departed; the sunlight was fast fading; one bright gleam still lingered lovingly upon the stern of the old vessel, and lit up the fresh white letters, "La Jeune Marguerite." All the way home the words danced before Ursule's eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

A QUARREL AND ITS RESULT.

Fal.—This chair shall be my state.

KING HENRY IV.

LOUIS was nearly as much excited as Ursule on the following morning by the preparations which it was necessary to make for the little feast. He insisted upon her pulling about the scanty furniture, changing the position of the pictures, and bringing in fresh green branches with which to decorate the stove, and certainly by his criticisms rather hindered her than otherwise; she taking it all with perfect good humour, and something of tender motherly love that was touching when the relations between them were considered.

"So?" said she, standing aside that he might judge whether the table with its snowy covering was placed exactly in the right angle.

"A little more this way. The red house is prettier than the other, for a view."

"Monsieur will not greatly regard the view,"

said Ursule, laughing. "O Louis, nothing but that idea of mine about the salad would have dragged him up all those stairs. Since you saw him, he has grown more of a porpoise than ever."

"Where can he sit?"

"That is perplexing me," she answered, glancing ruefully round.

"He will break down the chairs."

"It is certain; and, moreover, one is broken already."

"Ursule, we have forgotten!—the oak chair!"

The girl clapped her hands. "Where are my wits? It is that, of course—the very thing, and it had quite gone out of my head. I should have brought it up the day after the fête, only Madame looked so proud and happy in it that I had not the heart to remove it."

"She could have it again," called out Louis, always anxious to prevent disagreement. But his sister did not hear him; she was already half-way down the stairs, bent upon the recovery of the borrowed property.

As ill-luck would have it, Madame was sitting in the very chair when its owner entered the room, and neither face nor attitude looked propitious. Her indignation with Ursule had increased rather than subsided; for although she might originally have been of many minds about going to Rouen, since an

obstacle had been placed in her way, she was persuaded it was the one pleasure without which she could not exist, and Ursule, as the means of disappointment, incurred her severest displeasure, without a thought of sympathy for what the refusal had evidently cost the girl. Her favourite mode of retaliation was to take no notice of her entrance, and she sat rigid and immovable, while Ursule, who always forgot the storms as soon as they were over, preferred her request as inoffensively as she could.

"I am desolated to disarrange Madame, but we—my brother and I—have friends with us to-day." She was proceeding to mention who the friends were, but prudently forbore, remembering that the Sanson name was apt to cause offence. She waited for some notice to be taken of the little announcement, which to her sounded very imposing; but finding no answer was vouchsafed, she went gaily on: "And the truth is, that we have not chairs enough, so that I am forced to ask Madame to let me take away this," laying her hand upon its carved back as she spoke.

"What!" cried the old lady, sharply.

"The chair, Madame—our chair."

Madame d'Aurigny rose up in a fever of indignation. "*Dites, donc*, have you come here to insult me? Not content with your infamous behaviour yesterday, your ingratitude towards me—me, who have been your best friend—not content with that,

do you desire to drag away the very chair I sit upon?"

"But it was only lent!" exclaimed Ursule, confounded.

"Do you then require the eyes to see that such an article as this belongs of right to the *salon*? If it has been all this time up-stairs with you, it proves only that the people of this house have no idea of the fitness of things. Do not suppose that I shall allow it to be removed."

"Madame!"

"Understand me, I shall not, I say!" cried Madame d'Aurigny, losing her dignity in rage, and raising her tones in a shrill crescendo.

"It is the chair in which Louis sits: you do not know what you say—you must be mad," said the girl, scornfully.

"Mad! Hear her—the insolent! And this is Madame Sanson's pattern demoiselle, the excellent sister, the admirable companion! Yes, yes, yes, this is she! But here you shall not remain; leave the apartment, do you hear?"

"Not without the chair. You are a bad, wicked woman to want to keep it from Louis," cried Ursule, in a passion.

"I repeat, it is not for people such as you: you may take one of the others in its stead. There!" said Madame, calming down a little.

"I will not. Bah! the chair is for us, and you shall not steal it."

"Never approach me again!" said Madame d'Aurigny.

"Rest assured, I will not."

"Go!"

"The chair, Madame."

In the midst of a torrent of words, which burst forth in answer, Ursule pulled the object of dispute towards the door. Madame would fain have sat upon it, and so impeded its removal; but the girl was young, strong, and angry, and she feared an ignominious discomfiture. She could only repeat in a voice half choked with rage,

"You shall never again be admitted; I endure this for the last time."

"If Madame's is *comme-il-faut* behaviour," retorted Ursule, with crimson face, "she has at least taught me what to avoid."

Madame slammed the door. Ursule dragged the great chair with difficulty up the stairs, her first glow of triumph fading into a sore, hurt sensation of shame. Never, in all her experience of quarrels, had there been a scene like this. She left the chair upon the highest landing, and ran in to Louis; and it was proof of the disturbance of her feelings that, instead of being careful to spare him from any share in the worry, she felt the longing to pour everything into his ear irresistible.

"I have brought it," she said, in a hurried voice; "but I am never going near her again."

"Ursule!"

"It is true, it is quite true," she went on passionately; "she is a wicked woman; and it humiliates me to lose myself, and say the things I cannot help saying."

"You can help calling her so wrong a name," said the boy, gravely, but still continuing to smooth the brown head laid upon his pillow, as if by that tender action he could quiet the angry whirl within.

"No one could bear it," she said, excusing herself a little.

"It is so hard, is it? But still——"

"Ah, Louis, you cannot judge;" then, fearing she had hurt him, she continued quickly, "It is we women, you know, who quarrel with one another."

"Yes, indeed, since the Olympian days!"

"I know you want me to think about its being wrong, but I am not good like you—I never shall be, and I don't feel the wrongness. It seems to me that, when one meets injustice, one ought to be angry—to resist. I hate it: it makes my heart burn, and then I say so;—why not? It is not for that I am sorry, but for the scolding that I do, just like Madame herself. It makes me despise myself, it is so little!"

Louis was painfully sensitive about giving advice. His pale face flushed. "You don't keep the reins

over yourself, is that it? I fancy you and Madame must be something alike; but that is nothing, because you know she has a right to expect forbearance." He hesitated, then drew out the little French Bible, which was always under his pillow, and, turning the pages rapidly, made Ursule look at the lines to which he pointed.

She looked and shook her head. "I suppose there are many good people who really feel like that: I cannot."

"You can do many disagreeable things for my sake, Ursule."

"Anything!" she answered quickly, turning upon him a face full of love. "But this would be all for myself. No? What do you mean? Ah, I see: yes, if one could realize that object, I can understand how it would make the hard things possible; but I do not realize it, or only a little—not as you do. I wish I could really be good. I wish it often, and it never, never comes."

An English girl would have more readily taken it for granted that the goodness would "come" some day, and the words sounded light; but there was a ring of earnestness and humility about them from which a more experienced and a less anxious observer than Louis would have drawn comfort. It was after speeches of this kind, however, that the boy, older in everything but years than his sister, longed most earnestly for some person to help and

advise them, and was most conscious of his own incapacity. All Madame Sanson's troubles and conscience-pricks were carried to confession, and she felt, on her return, to use her own expression, as light as an egg-shell. She had a simple confiding faith, never disturbed by side-winds of doubt, seldom with questions of what she ought or ought not to do: if such a question embarrassed her, she packed it carefully on one side, in a sort of mental receptacle which corresponded with the pocket of her dress, until the appointed Saturday evening, when she found her way to the dimly lighted church, and yielded up a somewhat heterogeneous collection, to be disposed of implicitly as Monsieur le Curé directed. Without such a resource she was helpless, and would only have been far more bewildered than Ursule if the wild questioning thoughts and longings that flitted through the girl's brain had been revealed to her. Her husband, on his part, like the majority of his class, was merely tolerant, not approving of the power of the priests, recognizing it as something to be feared, and, for that very reason, secretly delighted when by some means—not of his own creating—it received a check, but equally unwilling to take a prominent part in opposition. Certainly, no help was to be derived from Monsieur or Madame Sanson; Madame d'Aurigny was yet more completely out of the question; and Louis replaced his little Bible beneath his pillow with a sigh which cut

Ursule to the heart. Up she sprang with one of her bewildering changes of mood.

"O Louis, why do you let me stay chattering, when I have more things to do than my head will hold? and in ten minutes they will be here!"

She darted hither and thither, working in earnest, putting finishing-touches to her arrangements with a light and graceful hand, and contriving to infuse a festive air over the homely, unpretending little room. A long interval elapsed between the creak announcing that Monsieur's foot was planted on the first step, and the great sigh which told that the ascent was completed; and when he came puffing into the room, his wife, on tiptoe behind him, nodding with good-humoured delight at the brother and sister, he sank speechless into the great chair with a weight that shook the house.

"Here we are, children," cried Madame, bestowing a pat on the head upon her husband, by way of assisting the recovery of his breath; "but truly it will not be well for the stability of the house if Sanson often makes these excursions. Courage, *mon ami*, you will be better presently."

Monsieur, an enormous man with iron-grey stubbly hair, and dressed in a loose brown alpaca coat, feebly shook his head, implying that he was not yet in a condition to exert himself, and Madame rattled on cheerily.

"How nice she has made everything look, the little one! Ah! she can be clever when she will. I will sit here close to Louis, and you there. Jules's breath is coming, so we can begin."

Madame had too much delicacy to have offered any assistance for this little banquet; and, as Ursule distrusted her own capacity for pleasing Monsieur too greatly to trust entirely to her own powers, she had ventured upon the extravagance of having one modest dish from the restaurateur, and was rewarded by the marked satisfaction which she saw gradually diffused over his face as soon as breath came to the aid of his senses.

"How is it with you, Louis?" pursued Madame; "has Ursule brought you home all the news lately?"

"Not much news," he said, smiling; "but I know about the sunset last evening, and the little girl, and the 'Jeune Marguerite,' do I not, Ursule?"

Madame stared. "What foolish things, to be sure! Have you not told him all the talk about Mademoiselle de Chaulieu and her marriage with M. Valette? Nor what you heard Susanne relating to me of her master, the sous-lieutenant's difficulties with his family? No? well, you young people are inexplicable! Have you seen our Madame to-day?"

The girl coloured crimson. "Do not talk of her! She expects me to endure too much; but it is at an end—I do not go to her again."

"Not go to her again!"

"Not?" grunted Monsieur, affectionately contemplating the morsel upon his fork.

"It is true."

"But what! why! I do not comprehend: she cannot do without you."

"I cannot help it," said Ursule, pettishly; "it is her own desire."

"Then it must be because you refused——" and Madame, feeling herself a miracle of prudence, stopped, nodded, and then shook her head. But she had gone too far. M. Sanson, feeling in himself an utter incapability of originating an idea, was in the habit of completing sentences for other people, and perceiving an opportunity for a speech longer than usual, he took advantage of his wife's pause.

"Because you refused to go to Rouen with the old lady," said he, triumphantly.

"Be quiet, Sanson!" interrupted his wife; but it was too late. Ursule bit her lip, Madame fidgeted, Monsieur opened his eyes; Louis alone took no apparent notice. "He talks without knowing what he says," continued Madame, apologetically.

"Eh?"

"There, there; that will do. Eat your dinner, like a good man."

M. Sanson laughed good-humouredly. "Ah, she crooked her finger when the ring was put on," he said, indicating his wife by a sign.

"What was that for?" inquired Louis.

"What! don't you know? When a young girl gets married, if the ring slides straight down the finger, she is her husband's slave all her life, poor thing; but if it stops at the second joint, he will never be able to get the upper hand. I thought of it for a week before, and much good that did me; for, when the time came, something took off my attention, and before I knew anything about it the ring was on! Ah, if I can only get a second chance!"

There was something so ludicrous in Madame's threat, and in the notion of her being in any sense a slave to her obedient husband, that Ursule could not help laughing merrily; and, after all, it was just possible Louis had not noticed that unlucky slip of Monsieur's—or he might forget it—or, at least, she would not think about it now. She made an efficient hostess, and the repast had evidently been brought to a successful termination, when Monsieur, with a sigh of satisfaction, washed down the whole of a Neufchâtel cheese with a tumbler of light wine; Louis, who could scarcely realize an ordinary man's appetite, looking on with wondering amusement.

"What has become of M. Pierre?" asked Madame.

"I have not seen him for an age."

"Nor I," said Louis, eagerly. "What can be keeping him away?"

"Perhaps what Auguste Drouet told me has

truth in it after all, though he talks so much that I do not pay attention to half; but he assured me that M. Renait desires his son to marry Mademoiselle Roget, daughter of the Maire of B——, with I do not know how many thousand francs dowry, and that the young man is averse."

She glanced at Ursule as she spoke. Madame could not live at the bottom of the stairs, and remain ignorant of Pierre's feelings towards the girl; but her own sentiments on the subject were conflicting. She was proud of her favourite's conquest, yet appalled at the utter hopelessness of such a marriage being ever permitted, and unable to solve her doubts as to her own conduct in the matter, by carrying them to confession, because she knew that afterwards the marriage of the rich clay-moulder's son with the young heretic could not innocently be allowed even to enter into her dreams. She would not altogether give up the idea, and yet dared not harbour it. She crossed her little fat hands on her lap, and looked curiously at Ursule as she announced his betrothal; but the girl only shrugged her shoulders and slightly lifted her eyebrows, and she could not make out whether her indifference was real or feigned. She chatted away for some time longer, until a summons came from below, and arousing Jules with difficulty from an after-dinner nap, she conveyed him safely down the stairs.

"It has been nice; but I wish you would not

look so terribly tired, Louis," said his sister, kneeling in her favourite attitude by his side.

"So that was your secret?"

"O Louis, I hoped you had not heard! That dear, stupid old Monsieur! But never mind now. After to-day, I would not go; no, not for all the holidays in the world. And what do I want of holidays? It just seemed tempting, you know, at first; but the feeling soon went away. I should be miserable without you. And with Madame! No, indeed."

Louis sighed. "I suppose it cannot be now; but I should dearly have liked you to go, my Ursule."

"I will tell you how it shall be: by-and-by, when you have earned a fortune, and grown strong, we will go together—you and I."

Grown strong! It seemed a mockery to talk of him and strength in one breath, and perhaps Louis felt it so, when he turned his face into the pillow and did not answer. He said nothing; nothing even when Ursule talked on, in a low, dreaming voice, of the lovely apple-orchards in their rosy blush of blossom, and the glossy chestnut trees, and the old grey chateaux by river banks, which they would see and linger by in that wonderful future time when he was strong. But his grasp tightened on the little brown Bible, and perhaps there came to him visions of a more abiding Beauty.

The day passed, and another after it; Ursule did not go near Madame, and Pierre Renait did not come. Louis was in despair about his friend; he had scarcely known how much he counted upon his visits, and what a break they made in the day's unvaried monotony, until now that they were wanting. He worried himself into one of his worst headaches when he found that the following morning came and went without Pierre; and Ursule acted the tyrant, and summarily deprived him of his painting, when she saw his hands so weak and trembling that he could hardly hold the brush. By this time she had relented towards Madame. Her anger was never long-lived, and when she pictured to herself the desolation and dreariness down-stairs, her heart smote her.

"After all, she does not mean what she says, any more than I do," she said to Louis. "I will run down as usual; I heard her come in not five minutes ago."

But her mission was unsuccessful. Madame's door was persistently locked, and though she asked for admittance more than once, not even a reply was vouchsafed. Tears gathered in her eyes as she slowly went up the stairs again. Were they losing all their friends? Had her tongue offended Pierre as surely as Madame? Never was she so gay as that afternoon in her endeavours to prevent Louis from missing his friend; she chatted, laughed, sang,

and brought her pigeons in to show him. The next day, when she knew again that Madame was at home, she went down, but with the same result; the door was fastened inexorably, and half irritated, half grieved, she went to Madame Sanson to know whether she could afford her an explanation.

Her old friend listened with a perplexed face. "She is obstinate, and she is very angry; I do not think anything will satisfy her but your going to Rouen."

"And that I cannot do," said Ursule sadly, "so there must be an end of the matter. You do not know how much Louis frets in his heart over Pierre not coming. The stupid fellow; he shall hear what I think of it when I see him."

"Perhaps the poor lad is ill."

And this suggestion, although it did not suffice for Ursule, who was a veritable autocrat on all points that touched Louis' comfort, served to carry up-stairs as a possible explanation of his conduct. The next day Pierre was still absent, and Ursule made no attempt at reconciliation with Madame. Perhaps she would have abstained yet longer, had not Louis looked so ill and wretched, and entreated her so earnestly once more to make the trial, that pride gave way to anxiety for him, and she knocked again at Madame's door, but only to find it as closely as ever barred against her.

"This is horrible!" she exclaimed, running down

to Madame Sanson; "how can Madame be so unforgiving? and how can she manage without me?"

"I have to do it—that is all. Well, child, never mind, there is no need for it; only one can't let her live as she would if it was left to herself. It makes my old bones ache; but what then? they are not the worse."

"I will make her let me in," said Ursule, stamping her foot, and much shocked at the extra labour which she knew her desertion must have entailed upon the good old woman.

"She will not, unless you are prepared with concessions. Why not go with her, child? You will be doing a kindness, as well as making the peace; and you know in your heart that Louis would like you to go, and that he shall be as well cared for as if he were my own."

"It is not possible. Even if I had thought of it before, I could not now, when he has not even Pierre."

"Ah, well, if that is all," said Madame mysteriously, "perhaps if you went Monsieur Pierre would come."

"If I went!—what riddles do you talk?"

"It used to be all very well; but you are older now, and Pierre is a modest young man; he knows that it is not altogether *convenable* for him to make so many visits, and that the world will talk. That is not good for a girl."

"Did Pierre himself tell you this?" asked Ursule, with curling lip.

"Something of the sort."

"When?"

"This very morning."

"I would not have believed—the folly, the childishness!" Her voice, angry and impetuous as it was, quivered. She began to think that all the world was against her, and she turned away from Madame and drummed with her fingers upon the window-panes.

Madame's account, though right in its conclusions, was not altogether correct as to facts. Pierre, it is true, had been there that morning, but it was in a fluster of indignation, and a professed determination to make his way up-stairs in spite of his father's injunctions. His presence on the balcony on the day of the fête had been commented upon and reported to his father, who, upon questioning his wife and daughters, learned something of the true state of the case, and determined at once to put matters upon a safe footing by giving a reality to what had long been talked of in the family, and asking the hand of rich Mademoiselle Roget for his son. Pierre had not dared so much as to expostulate when his father quietly added a desire that his visits at the Lafons' should be discontinued; but he made up for his silence by storming furiously in private, and his conversation with Madame Sanson was en-

livened by a variety of distracted ejaculations and gestures which were absolutely tragic in their vehemence. After what he confided to her, she had the good sense to refuse to allow him to go up-stairs; and perhaps her decision relieved him, although he thought it necessary to press for permission, and to declare himself ready to defy all the enemies of his happiness and cling to Ursule. He really felt and looked very wretched; but, after all, he did not for a moment entertain the idea of combating his father's will, and was well aware that his fate in the shape of a contract would soon be signed.

Madame had altered this little history in her hint to Ursule, and for two reasons — first, out of delicacy to the girl, and, secondly, from doubt of what her feelings might be. If she could be induced to go away, there was no occasion, she reasoned, for her little excursion to be spoiled, as it surely would be if she had thought of young Monsieur Pierre in anything beyond the light of Louis' friend; and, on the other hand, this absence, short as it was, might be the means of distracting her thoughts, and changing their current. She dwelt upon all this with real admiration for her diplomatic powers, and was so wrapped up in it that she started and uttered a little scream, when Ursule turned suddenly round and said abruptly,

"I have heard it said that when one has wished for something very much, it often comes with all the

pleasantness taken out of it. At first I wanted to go to Rouen, and, now that I do not wish it at all, I suppose I shall go."

"Good, good!" said Madame Sanson. "Now all will be well. Not wish to go? Bah! that is folly. It will enchant you so that you will never want to come back again."

"Who is to tell Madame?" asked Ursule, still crossly.

"I will manage all that. And see here, I will sleep in your room all the time you are away, so that Louis shall want for nothing in the night."

The girl flung her arms round her neck.

"You are a hundred times better to me than I deserve! Will you really do that? Then I shall go with a light heart, and I will begin to enjoy it from this moment, if it is only to please you."

Madame had no fears of her lodger. She knew that such a concession on Ursule's part would at once restore her to good humour; and she was right. Nothing could be more gracious, more affable, than Madame d'Aurigny that evening when Ursule went to see her. No allusion was made to past disagreements or bolted doors; she was full of talk about the charms of her relation, the avocat's wife, and the costumes to be arranged for the visit. From every receptacle in the room she had rummaged the faded splendours of past days. Ursule—who was inwardly chafing at having been, as it were, cajoled

into the expedition against her judgment, and, if the truth must be told, a little bit jealous at Louis' expressions of delight—was seized with horror lest Madame might be going to array herself for the occasion in some of these strange relics. If Madame had not been absorbed in her own affairs, the girl's manner could scarcely have escaped comment: she would not profess any pleasure, scarcely attempted thanks, and gave her opinion listlessly, only rousing herself to speak with energy when it was necessary to withhold Madame from some very preposterous scheme of decoration. The truth was, that her nature was altogether undisciplined, and it was the spoiled-child instinct that made her desire to punish Madame for having entrapped her into giving way to her wishes.

Yet, in spite of herself, and a determination not to be agreeable, she could not help, little by little, feeling drawn into interest. The change, the novelty, the first journey she remembered—new people, a new place, a new life; there was too much quicksilver in her composition for her to remain really passive at the prospect. Her very ignorance saved her the shy misgivings which might be expected to trouble a girl in her position. It is true that her dress caused her some qualms, for a more slender wardrobe can scarcely be conceived; but, with her dreams of a genial and easily satisfied world, the thought did not cause her much anxiety. A bright

ribbon made it pretty in Louis' eyes, and she concluded it would be the same with others. Louis, nevertheless, was not so secure, and Madame d'Aurigny herself anticipated the question before Ursule made up her mind to inquire.

"What is to be your new robe for the occasion?"

"Mine, Madame."

"But certainly! It is necessary; it will not be possible for you to enter the house of a family of distinction like my cousin's without it."

"Then," said Ursule, resolutely, "I had better stay away. A new dress, Madame! and where is the money to come from. Decidedly, I can only stay away."

"Do not be so impetuous; you take away one's breath. There can be no question now of going or staying, since the letter is despatched announcing our arrival on Saturday."

"Nevertheless, Madame, I need not go."

"Bah, bah! I only spoke in jest. The dress will do charmingly! A little re-trimming:—not even that? Well, it is simple," said Madame, making up her mind to the shabby attire with a sigh; "and on the whole it may be as well that the dress should be remarkable only on me."

"They will not expect much when they know that I sweep your room," said Ursule, mischievously.

"Hush, child, hush! Are you mad? Do you not know that you go as a demoiselle, as my friend? You will ruin me with your imprudence! I entreat you to be discreet, and not to proclaim everything which goes on here in private. My cousin would be shocked were she to learn to what a position my unfortunate affairs have reduced me; it is unnecessary that she should do so. If you find yourself drawn dangerously into allusions, pass lightly on, treating it as badinage. I depend upon your discretion."

Luckily for the lately established peace, at this moment Madame Sanson entered the room, and Ursule was enabled to escape and carry her indignation to Louis. But he would hear no complaints. So completely had he conquered the first selfish disinclination to spare her—if, indeed, it could at any time have been called by so harsh a name—that there was nothing forced in his warm delight, and never could she remember him so buoyant and well as during the day or two that elapsed before Saturday. Her dreams were nothing in comparison with his, and the minutest preparation was to him full of interest.

Throughout Friday the rain poured down pitilessly. A kind of tarpaulin covering was drawn across the opening over the stairs; the house was darkened; the rain went on steadily drip, drip, upon the temporary roof. Ursule and Louis sat hand in

hand, talking busily. He would not allow her to be in the least sentimental about the parting, either then or when the parting really came; and very little would have served her for an excuse, even at the last moment, to withdraw her promise.

"St. Ouen, remember, Ursule; the transept windows and the west porches."

"Yes."

"And the organ staircase at St. Maclou, of which my father made a drawing."

"Honestly, my Louis, does it make you happier for me to go?"

"Honestly, it does. Already I am feasting upon your coming back; and you know that if the blind beggar can't see the world, it is as well for his dog to look about him! Do not put any more impossible things within my reach, but come here and tell me how soon you will be able to write."

"The very instant I get there. Hark! Yes, Madame, I am coming. Louis, the *facteur* has come for the luggage; I must go. Oh, this is dreadful! I will never do it again; do you hear? This is the first and last time. Coming, Madame! Good-bye, my dear one, good-bye—a hundred good-byes!"

When Louis relaxed the listening attitude which he preserved while the faintest echo of her step and voice was audible, the bright flush on his cheek had completely faded away. He leant back against the

pillows, and closed his eyes, her last words in his thoughts: "She will never do it again. No, she is right; in our next separation it will be for me to go, for her to be left behind!"

CHAPTER V.

THE CLAYTONS.

There is a house in the city of London, No. 100, New Terrace, London, the drawing-room at its owners. It was a long room, before we glance at its owners. The fireplace, to which the chimney-piece, and curiously carved chimney-piece, stood halfway down the room, and was flanked on either side by low, comfortable-looking book-cases. The room ended in a large bow, curtained and fitted with a comfortable window-seat, opposite to the fireplace was a small sofa and a piano. The floor was carpeted and evidently seen many years of service, and the pattern repeated imagination to come to the mind of the eyes, but it blended admirably with the room.

CHAPTER V.

THE CLAYTONS.

Upon the glass the creeping fly
Will shut out mightiest worlds on high,
And care, to earthly projects given,
Will hide from man his God and heaven.

"The Cathedral."

PEOPLE show their characters in their rooms; therefore it may not be amiss to give a sketch of the drawing-room at No. 100, New Terrace, London, before we glance at its owners. It was a long room, plainly but prettily furnished; the fire-place, to which the fancy of the first possessor had added a high, old-fashioned, and curiously carved chimney-piece, stood half-way down the room, and was flanked on either side by low, comfortable-looking book-cases. The room ended in a large bow, curtained and fitted with a chintz-covered window-seat; opposite to the fire-place was a small sofa and a piano. The Persian carpet had evidently seen many years of service, so that the pattern required imagination to come to the aid of the eyes; but it blended admirably with

the well-worn air of the greater number of articles in the room. The china that was placed about, though excellent of its kind, was solid-looking, and not such as might easily be broken; two oriental jars stood upon the wooden chimney-piece, over which was suspended an oblong mirror, in an old-fashioned, lightly carved ebony frame; the paper on the walls was pale tea-green; pictures were sprinkled about—one an especially striking chalk head of a beautiful woman; and upon the table were two or three little easels supporting photographs and illuminations. It was very unlike a London room; but the part where the house stood had so lately been country, that green fields and nursery-gardens were still to be seen from the upper windows; the air was still pure; and the box of gay scarlet geraniums and mignonette outside, and the graceful, silvery fern which grew within, flourished as luxuriantly as if smoke and fog were miles away.

The room was not empty. In a corner, close to one of the book-cases, stood a pair of steps, and upon them was perched a young girl, picture-arranging.

"There!" said she, with a sigh of relief, letting her arms drop by her side.

"Never soliloquise, Joyce; but if you are at any time betrayed into the weakness, above all things do not confine yourself to disjointed adverbs."

"Papa! I had no idea you were in the room."

“‘When people leave this lower world, and choose to live on stilts,’” began Mr. Clayton, mischievously.

“Does it not look well?” said his daughter, descending, and stepping back to examine the result of her labours with a critical eye.

“Oh, I see! That is the one of which I am always in doubt whether it is upside down or not—which is water and which sky. At all events, it is a satisfaction to have the problem solved for one.”

“Never mind,” said Joyce, good-humouredly, quite undisturbed by her father’s bantering tone; “it fills that gap in the wall capitally, and it is just as well that something should be left to the imagination.”

“My dear, if I had complained, it would have been on that very score. My imagination has always revelled in that gap.”

“Papa, papa!”

“Well, I submit, as usual. Are you coming with me?”

“Where?”

“To St. Andrew’s.”

“Oh, I should so much like it; but then——”

“Well, what stands in the way?”

“I promised the Miss Tinlings to give them a lesson in that church work. After that, the Hewitts want to know about Lydia Baker.”

Mr. Clayton's genial face looked grave, and he did not answer. Joyce, quick to notice every expression of her father's, said at once:

"Did you wish me to go?"

"Joyce, I was thinking that your life is becoming too busy."

"So it is, papa. Really sometimes it seems to me that from morning to night I never have a moment to myself. It is not only when I first awake and think of what has to be done, that the day seems overfilled; but the next day, and the day after that, I can see must be just the same. To-day is Tuesday; well, let me see: to-morrow, Thursday, Friday—yes, Saturday is the first day which has a few hours not yet mapped out."

Joyce paused, and her father was still silent; she fancied he was thinking that her life was too hard-worked, and went on cheerfully:

"But after all, papa, though I do sometimes grumble, I do not know that I am really much worse off than other people. Every one lives at railroad speed now-a-days: the weeks are not half long enough for the things that have to be crammed into them. And I am sure, on the whole, that it suits me; I should be perfectly miserable unless my hands were full."

"Nevertheless, Joyce, I am not sure that it is good for you."

"It doesn't hurt me, papa; I am quite strong."

"Yes," said Mr. Clayton, looking fondly on his daughter's healthy, handsome face; "I don't think you will easily be overdone with hard work, in health; and we will put that on one side, or leave the question to your mother. But there are other ways of your life harming you."

Joyce drew back, a little hurt.

"Papa, do you mean that I do anything of which you disapprove?"

"I mean that the choking thorns are not only the riches or the pleasures of the world."

"But the cares also? Yes, of course; but then, what is one to do?—everything does seem to come at once. Besides, papa, the things themselves——" Joyce hesitated.

"Are useful, you mean?"

"Yes; at least, I mean they are not pleasant; it is not that I like them. Surely that must be different?"

"Self-indulgence would never be your form of self-pleasing, Joyce."

She twisted a slip of paper she was holding into a spill.

"What is one to do?" she said, a little impatiently. "Papa, you really don't know how the small things accumulate!"

Mr. Clayton took no notice of the tone, but he answered quietly, "The only safeguard for any of

us is to cultivate the spirit of watchfulness. We are taught to set bounds to our pleasures; but it is by no means impossible for so-called duties to run away with us—eh, Joyce? My dear, I know how much you get through, and, as far as I am concerned, I only blame myself for using your help so largely as I do——”

“Papa, don’t say that; I like it,” interrupted Joyce.

“But,” continued her father, “there is the universal rule, that we must take in, in order rightly to give out. Put the question honestly to yourself, does a quiet time ever come? Is not a fresh scheme or excitement always presenting itself?”

Joyce was silent. “Thank you for telling me,” she said at length, with something of an effort. “I will think over it; only really I don’t believe you know how impossible it is to keep out of a network. Now, there is this affair of Lydia Baker’s.”

“I thought Miss Foster had undertaken Lydia Baker.”

“So she has, but she makes such mistakes!”

“Poor Miss Foster!” said Mr. Clayton, resuming his usual cheery manner; “one mistake is heavily visited upon her! By the way, Joyce, I had forgotten what I came in to tell you. Clement will be here to-night.”

“To-night! Why he is a perfect Will-o’-the-Wisp! And really, he might give us a little longer

notice. I will go and see about his room at once. Does mamma know?"

"Your mother has a headache, and is lying down: don't let her be disturbed. If Maynard comes about the harmonium, you must speak to him, and tell him that his first experiments upon the musical future of the district had better for the present be confined to the Gilpins and Walter Brett. I suppose that the steps may as well depart with me?"

He shouldered them as he spoke, and went out of the room, Joyce following him into the landing, and then going thoughtfully up-stairs.

"Visitors by the dozen on such a day as this, and then Mr. Maynard to expatiate for an hour upon those wearisome harmonium stops. If papa is right, what is to become of one! I know that I have been obliged to take bits out of my reading-time; but still they are all necessary things that I do, and it is very, very hard to avoid them. People are for ever letting their stitches drop, and expecting others to pick them up again, like old Granny Wilcox and her grandchild. Half the things come because I am a clergyman's daughter, and really it is impossible for papa to understand. I am sure I should be thankful to have more leisure."

Which, as far as it went, was quite true, to do Joyce Clayton justice. Activity and energy were at once thrown into anything which came before her in the light of a duty, but none the less would

she often gladly have launched them into pleasanter paths.

Mr. Clayton was perpetual curate of a district church in a London suburb, and Joyce was an only child. Ever since the time when she was a little toddling baby, just able to stand by his chair and hold up a rosy mouth for kissing, she had been her father's pet and constant companion; so that, from her alphabet onwards, he had taught her all she knew, except the music which was her mother's special branch. Consequently, the love which existed between them was as deep and full as such a love could be. Joyce inherited her father's talent, as well as a certain capability which accompanied it, and added tenfold to its usefulness; but the peculiar sunny brightness of his disposition was not so entirely shared by her. It was a rare charming quality. Clouds might threaten, annoyances gather, a hundred parochial worries surround him, and still his buoyant spirit and a never-failing spring of fun seemed to shake them off without an effort. There was something so genial, so generous, so young, in his nature, that it attracted people, whether they would or not; and to have Mr. Clayton at a vestry meeting was certain victory over the most pig-headed of church-wardens.

As Joyce reached the head of the stairs, her mother called her into her bed-room. She sat in a low chair by the window, working—a fair, pretty,

placid woman, altogether unlike her dark winsome-looking little daughter.

"Where is your father, Joyce?"

"He has just this moment gone out, mamma."

"How tiresome! I quite forgot to tell him that the glass must be taken out of the store-room."

"He thought you were resting; so that he would not disturb you."

"Dear me, it is very vexing, with Clement coming this evening."

"What brings up Clement at this time of the year, when he never can be induced to recognise London at all?"

"There is his letter—you can read it; I am sure I hardly understand it myself, Clement's handwriting is so puzzling; but there is something about his going to France."

"To see his aunt!" Joyce exclaimed, reading in astonishment. "I hope she won't turn out such another woman as Mrs. Blunt herself."

"It will not matter to you, Joyce."

"Not at all. It is only for Clement's sake."

"Clement should be more considerate, and not come at such unexpected times. I thought his carpet was to be turned or something?"

"Papa gave orders about it last week, luckily. I dare say this is some sudden freak of Mrs. Blunt's, and that he is obliged to set off at once; otherwise he might certainly have bestowed a longer warning

upon us. Never mind, it is not really of any consequence."

"That is all very well, my dear, but you are no judge; you have not to look after the cook, and she quite alarms me by her manner: I wish your father would speak to her."

"Stupid thing!" said Joyce, indignantly, "you are a great deal too good-natured to her, mamma. Why don't you give her a good set down, and make her understand?"

"Your father must do it; I cannot undertake it. How dreadfully hot it is! What are you going to do this afternoon? I wish you would come with me to the nursery-gardens."

"I can't possibly, mamma. Mr. Maynard is coming about the harmonium, and the Tinlings about those church markers, and the Hewitts about Lydia Baker."

"Well," said Mrs. Clayton, submissively, for she never interfered with her daughter's plans, "then, I suppose I must go by myself."

"The flowers in the drawing-room are still quite fresh, you know, mamma."

"Quite faded, you mean, Joyce. I was absolutely ashamed of them yesterday when the Mileses were here. No; flowers are the one luxury I cannot do without—my one indulgence."

Joyce sighed, and said no more. It might be but one luxury, but it was a very expensive one,

and a burdensome addition to the weekly bills. When she was able to go with her mother, she contrived to check the expenditure, but it was very seldom that she had the time. She went to the window, and looked idly out in a manner unlike herself. It was, as Mrs. Clayton had said, unusually hot. The window was wide open, and full of mignonette plants—an outer sun-blind let down. The opposite houses were in grey shadow, but nothing could soften their inflexible lines, or make them look otherwise than hard and oppressive. In not a few the shutters were closed, and the occupants had escaped from dusty London to the sweet country life of green lanes, and dewy gardens, and delicious hay-fields. One poor little hopeful bird, down in an area, sang with all its might a song of rejoicing over the square bit of blue sky above its cage. The district was not as yet so densely crowded but that glimpses of trees might be caught in and out between the houses, but the roads were new and stony; giant notices of building leases reared themselves up here and there, wherever a little uneven patch of green met the eye; great rubbish deposits marked the places where other rows were soon about to spring; boys hung about the wooden fences surrounding them; a woman with a glaring white cap rattled her milk-cans noisily down the street; in the distance, a hurdy-gurdy feebly droned over and over again the last new popular air. Joyce turned away from

the window, thinking that, over and over again, was the daily burden of life.

"Please, Miss Clayton, some gentleman wants to see master or you."

"Show him into the study, and I will come. It is Mr. Maynard, mamma."

Joyce ran down the stairs. Hitherto the new church had gone on—very indifferently, to be sure—without instrumental aid; now, however, the harmonium was to represent an organ, and Mr. Maynard the organist. She was not detained quite the length of time she anticipated; but the hurdy-gurdy had ground three times through its tunes before Mr. Maynard finished all he had to say, discussed the place where it could most advantageously stand, the merits of certain stops, and the formation of practising classes. It was very wearisome to Joyce, who did not love music sufficiently well to feel enthusiasm for it upon its own account, and only looked upon it in the light of something which ought to be done; but, in spite of her feeling, she contrived, as usual, to throw herself heartily into the cause, and to sympathise so brightly with poor Mr. Maynard's difficulties that he never so much as suspected the penance he was inflicting upon her.

"Twice a week at present, at seven o'clock, in the boys' school-room, on Wednesdays and Saturdays. You may depend upon my being regular, and I dare say my mother will spare our housemaid, who has

fortunately been taught class-singing at school. Good afternoon, Mr. Maynard. There go two evenings," groaned poor Joyce disconsolately, as the door closed. "It will be a dreadful tie to one, especially now in these delicious long summer days, when I do sometimes get a walk with papa; however, the harmonium is a special hobby of his, so that he cannot complain; and if I do not go, those horrid Allens will have it all their own way. Modern Painters! Where did it come from, I wonder? and this is the volume with that grand description of cumuli, and cirrhi, and all the clouds."

Joyce pounced with delight upon the book, but a voice in the hall, very audible through the thin walls, made her utter an exclamation of annoyance, and jump up to look for the silks required for her lesson in church work. The Miss Tinlings were impressible ordinary young ladies, full of admiration for Miss Clayton's superior talents, and giving vent to their astonishment in certain stereotyped ejaculations. Joyce laboured through instructions which seemed to her childishly minute as to ribbon and silk and gold braid, and got nothing more satisfactory than, "Oh, fancy!" from the eldest Miss Tinling, and "Exactly," from the younger, at the conclusion; and even the latter word was deprived of the hope it at first conveyed that she was understood, when, in a hesitating voice, she was told that really they felt so afraid that they were quite cer-

tain to fail, that they should be most grateful if she would kindly trace the patterns for them upon the ribbon. It was just the difficult part of the whole concern, and Joyce felt infinitely provoked.

"If you really want to learn, you had better do it all yourselves," said she severely.

"Oh, Miss Clayton, I am sure I never could. What, trace all these fine lines? Oh, fancy!"

"But, indeed, if you would not mind just setting it going so far, and then would kindly give us one more lesson, I really think we might accomplish something. Not like your beautiful work, of course—that we could not expect; but ours, if it is not looked at too closely, might do."

"Then, you must wait," Joyce said despairingly; "I have really very little time to spare."

"Exactly. I am sure we often say, Arabella and I, that we wonder how you can possibly get through half what you do. You must be always at work."

"Just fancy!" ejaculated Arabella.

"And I am sure if there is anything we could do at any time to help you, if you would show us exactly how you like it done, we would do our very best."

"Thank you," said Joyce, touched by the real good nature which underlay all these unpromising offers of help, and making up her mind to get up an hour earlier and set the markers in train.

The sisters were so charmed with the pleasantness of her manner, that they lingered some time longer, finally taking leave with many more suggestions of assistance, and assurances of a speedy second visit. Joyce had but time to scribble a hasty note, asking the character of a servant, when Mrs. and Miss Hewitt were announced. Mother and daughter came stiffly into the room, wanting to be set at ease, and evidently disappointed at not finding Mr. Clayton there to befriend them with his genial courtesy. They had come to speak on the subject of Lydia Baker; but it was so apparent that they could not comfortably enter upon it or any other conversation until the weather, past, present, and future, had been disposed of, that quite five minutes was given up unreservedly to a discussion of its merits, and the heat had been satisfactorily resolved into an imaginary thunder-storm before Joyce ventured to inquire.

"Have you made up your mind about Lydia Baker?"

"We could not do so altogether without coming to consult—Mr. Clayton," Mrs. Hewitt was going to say, but stopped, thinking it not quite polite.

"Miss Foster recommended us to come," put in her daughter.

"I suppose, after Lydia's behaviour, Miss Foster is averse to her being tried?"

"No, indeed, Miss Clayton. She considers the

girl to be weak and easily led; but, in the sort of situation for which my sister requires her, she would be altogether under the eye of a very steady, respectable person, and Miss Foster believes might do well. Still it is a matter of real consequence, and my husband is very anxious to know Mr. Clayton's opinion."

"Lydia was in my class, and we were greatly interested in her; but her conduct has been exceedingly bad."

"She is very young," pleaded Mrs. Hewitt, and then stopped confused. It seemed almost a charge against Joyce herself.

"She has chosen bad companions; and then came all this Dissenting business, and her impertinence to Miss Foster."

"Miss Foster thinks she may not have been altogether judicious in her treatment of the girl. She does not wish Lydia's behaviour to herself to be considered."

"But, Mrs. Hewitt, just consider. She has had more advantages than one girl out of twenty, and now she makes this return. It is gross ingratitude."

"Of course," said Mrs. Hewitt, hesitating, "if Mr. Clayton thinks——"

"Joyce was honesty itself. "Papa does not think so badly of her as I do," she said; "but I am convinced Miss Foster is wrong in still believing in her."

"Thank you. I will tell my husband. I hope your mamma is well?"

"Pretty well, thank you; she has just gone out."

"Ah! I am afraid she will find it very oppressive."

The weather returned again, and terminated the conversation. As the mother and daughter walked away from the door, Jane Hewitt said,

"As Miss Clayton speaks so decidedly, you won't think any more of Lydia Baker, I suppose?"

"My dear," said her mother, quietly, "Miss Clayton is very sensible and clever; but she is very young, and, in my experience of life, I have found no judges so unmercifully severe as young girls. Miss Foster is a goose; but she has lived longer in the world, knows its trials and temptations, and, if the matter rested with myself, I should abide by her opinion. But your father has only seen her weak side, and I cannot tell how he will wish me to act. Only pray, Jane, don't condemn everybody whom Miss Clayton dislikes."

If Joyce could only have heard her!

She had hurried up-stairs, feeling as if at last escape to her own room was possible, but caught even on the road by the little housemaid with inquiries as to the arrangement of certain chairs in Mr. Blunt's room. Mr. Blunt's room it remained always, kept for the favourite cousin since the time

when he spent his holidays with them, during two years that his father and mother were travelling abroad, and still scarcely less home to him than the Devonshire cottage where he lived with his mother. She was Félicité, Madame d'Aurigny's sister. Long ago, when she was very young, Mr. Blunt fell in love with her in Paris, and brought her back to England as his wife. So many years had passed since then, that she had almost ceased to be French in more than birth; for some time she paid periodical visits to her father and mother, and after their death to her sister; but she and her husband both grew older, travelling became wearisome, money more valuable, the visits were discontinued. His death finally threw her into a state of health in which a morbid dread of change became a predominant fancy, and for years nothing had passed between her and Madame d'Aurigny except an occasional correspondence, constrained on both sides. Clement was too good a son ever to discuss his mother's peculiarities; but Joyce was shrewd enough to put together little trifles, and to make a tolerably correct guess at her character. The relationship to the Claytons was on Mr. Blunt's side: he and Mrs. Clayton were first cousins, and, as not unfrequently happens, the intimacy was closer in the second generation than the first.

When Joyce reached her room, she glanced round her with a sigh of satisfaction. It looked par-

ticularly cool and pleasant. Here, as elsewhere in the house, the furniture was as pretty as it was simple: a curtainless bed, stained deal chairs and table, a few good illuminations, some admirable photographs in Oxford frames, and a tempting but not particularly tidy book-stand. Joyce had intended, as she told her father, to occupy the short time she knew would be disengaged in thinking over his words, and in trying to find out how much of truth their warning contained, but she could not concentrate her thoughts. Even with the first attempt there arose a vision of the markers, the shape of the emblems, the colour of the ribbon; then Clement floated into her head, accompanied by a throb of warm pleasure at the prospect of soon seeing him; and he was in turn driven out by a recollection of Lydia Baker's misdeeds, and an uneasy conviction that Mrs. Hewitt was not so deeply impressed by them as she ought to have been.

Is it the especial snare of those who enter keenly into whatever occupies them, that the interest clings too closely? Some such misgiving passed through Joyce Clayton's mind; then her eye sought the illuminated text which hung above her dressing-table, and she felt satisfied: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might." It had been her motto from a child—thoroughness in the smallest matter, were it but the making a pincushion.

On her table lay a small photograph ready for

tinting, and by its side an open paint-box. Joyce knew she had just time to do what was required before three little school-girls came for a lesson in knitting. Thinking could be put off till the day was over, and meanwhile she would take advantage of the last rays of the sun and work. It was rest as well to sit where something that deserved to be called fresh air came in at the open window, and where it was not impossible to get a really broad field of sky, without intervening chimneys or the necessity of making the best of smoke by imagining it to be cloud.

Joyce's own face was quite without cloud. Unconsciously, as often happens, her countenance assumed the expression of that she was copying, and looked more subdued and tender than usual. Her eyes were brown, bright, and quick in movement; her hair and eyelashes several shades darker than her eyes; her complexion clear; all her actions prompt and alert. She made good progress in her work, and nothing could have been neater or more to the purpose than the few well-chosen touches which her hand bestowed. When the church clock struck seven, and the band which came to the terrace twice a week struck up its first tune from the "Barbieri," Joyce jumped up, looked at her photograph with satisfaction, and hastily put aside her paints.

"Now for the stockings," said she; "and then

either Clement will have arrived, or I shall get a talk with papa."

She peeped into the study on her way down to what she called the parish-room.

"I heard you come in, papa."

"Does that mean that you are come to take possession?"

"Not yet. It is stocking-night," said Joyce, holding up her knitting-needles, and making a face.

"Ah! I thought I saw Hannah admit the three Fates. Which represents Atropos?"

"Why?"

"Because I shall know to whom I am indebted for dropped stitches. Is your mother's headache better?"

"Yes—or, at least, I think so," said Joyce, correcting herself. "She has gone to the nursery gardens this evening, and I dare say has been kept in Malvern Square."

"Alone?"

"Yes; I could not go. Papa, Miss Foster is so weak as to wish the Hewitts to try Lydia Baker at the Children's Convalescent Home."

"She is a capital woman, upon my word," said Mr. Clayton, with energy. "Half the district visitors in the world would be affronted at that girl's conduct."

"And don't you think they would be right?"

"Don't you see, Joyce, what I admire in her is

the way she puts aside personal feelings. She thinks of the people, not of herself."

"But then she encourages ingratitude! Papa, I see in your eyes that you will think I was wrong, for I tried to persuade Mrs. Hewitt not to take Lydia. And you know Miss Foster was altogether mistaken about her, last month."

"Hum! The Fates must be growing impatient by this time."

"Yes, I know. You are not going out again?"

"I shall go and meet your mother. And I think it not impossible that I may walk round by the Hewitts. There, be off!"

Joyce went down to her three little expectant maidens, not altogether satisfied. She was ready to submit to her father, with a warm proud delight in his superiority; but to have Miss Foster's judgment preferred before her own was no slight trial—Miss Foster, the little, shrinking, undecided woman, who had been as slow to accept the responsibility of district-visiting as she was ready tearfully to acknowledge her mistakes and to accept advice. Advice had always been promptly administered by Joyce, and if she had looked more closely into her heart at this moment she would have found there a wrathful feeling against Miss Foster for what might be considered a rebellion. But, although the question actually crossed her mind, whether she was not indeed unreasonable, she put it aside. At all events,

there was no time to think about it now. A busy click of needles went on in the little room. "Knit two, purl two," repeated Joyce. "Bessie, your heel will never be done, unless you are more careful." "Please, 'm, mother wishes for a rib." Little balls of yarn grew smaller and smaller, the light faded away, the children stood up to go, and a voice was heard in the passage, "Mr. and Mrs. Clayton both out, are they? Then where is Miss Clayton?"

CHAPTER VI.

EVERY-DAY DUST.

Full oft in dull unbroken flow
The river of our life steals on;
And thoughts that once could make it glow
Are all too willingly foregone.

Some light it takes from heaven—and yet
The round of small prosaic cares
Wins, day by day, more power to set
A gulf between us and our prayers.

W. BRIGHT.

THERE was a warm greeting between the cousins, who had been brought up together like brother and sister, when Joyce ran up into the hall. The cabman had just carried in a portmanteau, and was being paid by a young man of six or seven and twenty, with a pleasant face, grey eyes, and light curly hair. He despatched the driver, and caught Joyce by both hands.

"So you are the only one at home? I began to think the family had decamped."

"You left trains such an open question, that there

was no use in making guesses as to which you would patronize."

"Well, let me look at you," he said, as they reached the drawing-room. "Joyce, I declare you are grown!"

"How brown you are!" said she, taking no notice of this insult. "We so rarely see you in summer that I don't know you with this sort of complexion."

"Then, according to my old nurse's theories, you don't know me at all."

"Why not?"

"Have you never heard of her prudence in declining to give an opinion upon people until she has 'summered and wintered' them?"

"Never: it is delightful."

"It would not suit you at all, Joyce. No power would prevent you from delivering your views after the first week."

"I wonder what power would prevent you from teasing?"

"The mildest of influences—common charity, if it bestowed upon me something to eat. I am famished, after a journey from Devonshire."

His cousin laughed, and ran off to give the necessary orders. She encountered her father and mother in the hall, and the greetings were gone through again as warmly as before, Clement evidently looking upon them as something infinitely nearer and dearer than ordinary cousins.

"There is a hamper down-stairs," he said, "which Sarah packed for you. I don't know exactly what it contains, but I fancy, flowers and greens, and those sort of things, which she believes to be unheard-of luxuries to you town-bound people. But it seems to me that you grow more flowers than we do."

"You have known mamma long enough to have learnt that," said Joyce, rejoining them.

"Thank you, Clement. I dare say there are some of the cottage roses."

"Some of the cottage strawberries would be still more to the purpose—eh, Joyce?"

"Oh, papa, I have thought of nothing else ever since I saw Clement!"

"Mr. Clayton, what has happened to Joyce? Has there been a revolt among the old women; or a successfully aggravating system pursued by the little boys of the parish?"

"Never mind us for the present. Such contingencies don't occur in our well-regulated domain. There is a great deal to hear about your own home news. How is your mother? and what is this expedition across the Channel about?"

Clement became grave at once. "I am afraid my mother is not at all well," he said; "she is sadly weak, and she becomes distressingly low about herself at times. You know the length of the garden-walk? Well, it is very rarely that I can get her so far."

"That is a change indeed!"

"My being away from her so much is a great trial. I don't know how it can be avoided," said the young man, sighing; "but it is quite true, as she says, that the days are long and lonely for her. She sits and broods over all the past time."

"Ah, Clement, depend upon it that 'recollectedness' of old age is an untold blessing," said Mr. Clayton, gently; and Joyce thought, though she said nothing, of the waters growing still and noiseless just before the last plunge of the cataract.

"The girls at the Rectory go to see her pretty often, I suppose?" asked Mrs. Clayton.

"Yes; only," said Clement, brightening into a smile, "I can never persuade her to consider them as any-bodies. She persists in treating them as children, and naturally they don't like it. But, really, they try to be attentive."

"How can she spare you now?"

"Oh, I forgot; that has still to be explained. Well, you know my mother has one relation, and but one, left in France—her sister. It is years since they have met; for my poor father gave up his custom of going abroad some time before his death, and Madame d'Aurigny could never be persuaded to come to England. Letters still come and go periodically. I don't think my mother has suffered from the separation as much as might have been expected until lately: perhaps she always felt it in her power

to see my aunt, if it was necessary, and now, for the first time, begins to dread the possibility of their never meeting again. At all events, she has been quite miserable about it lately, distressed at my not having seen her since I was a small boy, and so anxious to have a really correct account from any eyewitness of her state of health and condition, that there was nothing for it but for me to give clients the slip, pack my portmanteau, and here I am on my way to Dieppe."

"But you must have been thinking about it for some time past?"

"Thinking about it—yes. But it was only yesterday morning that I found her heart was set upon my starting without delay."

"So you are really going to see an unknown aunt!" said Joyce, much interested. "Do you know anything about her? What is she like?"

"I don't imagine she is like my mother's only portrait, taken when they were Félicité and Hortense Devaux together. There she has bright eyes, short curls clustering round her head, a thing at the back of it like a tower, and a waist under her arms."

"She lives at Dieppe, you say; yes, I remember—and alone?"

"Quite alone. Poor thing, she must have a solitary time of it."

"Older than your mother?" asked Mr. Clayton.

"No; a few years younger. My mother was the eldest, and the beauty. Don't you recollect her being with her poor grandfather and grandmother at Nantes, as a little child of two or three years old, and being taken out with the other poor children to be shot down by hundreds in the Plaine de Saint Mauve, and one of the butchers being so touched by the loveliness and innocent unconsciousness of the little thing, that he managed to save her, and brought her back to his wife with the words, 'If there is a Judgment after all, here is one of Carrier's accusers. There will be enough without her.'"

They had heard the story before, but it could never lose its force.

"The wife behaved nobly, did she not?" said Joyce.

"Like a true-hearted woman. She risked her own life to save her. What a time it was! There were the poor father and mother at Bordeaux in peril themselves, and unable to hear any definite tidings; only the most horrible rumours of their parents being drowned in the *noyades*, and the child fusiladed. And the first part was true."

"It is very strange to look at you, and believe that you have all that French blood in your veins."

"He is the image of his father," said Mrs. Clayton.

"My name seems the only relic that clings to me. My poor great grandfather was Clément."

"Have you kept up any connection between your family and the people who saved your mother's life?" said Joyce, who had been listening with eyes full of interest.

"What would I not give if we had done so!" said Mr. Blunt, eagerly. "It has not been our fault. For a long time my mother wrote regularly, and went to see them whenever she and my father were in France; but, first of all, Madame Laget died, and then her husband wrote but seldom. They had but one child—Marie, and she married, whom he have never been able to find out; and at last, when old Laget died himself, all the links seemed broken."

"There is a rominee lying in wait for you somewhere, Clement," Mr. Clayton said. "But, to return to your aunt, do you imagine her circumstances to be good?"

"Indifferently so, I dare say. She never alludes in her letters to anything which should make us think the contrary. She speaks of her *salon* and her pleasant view, and dwells a good deal upon living *au premier*; so I suppose she is sufficiently comfortable."

"Well, I think your mother is right, and that it is high time you should go and look after your relations. Blood is thicker than water. And I tell you what you may do. You young men of the present day are so abominably narrow-minded about your Gothic vagaries, you will look at nothing else.

When you are at Dieppe, just take a walk to Varengeville, and bring back word whether you don't acknowledge that poor despised Renaissance has something to say for itself after all. Such medallions as those to be called worthless, indeed!"

Clement made a face, which argued ill for an unprejudiced opinion.

"Do you cross to-morrow?" inquired Mrs. Clayton.

"No. Business keeps me in town all day, so I shall take the early boat the following morning."

"Then you shall come to-morrow evening to the school, and hear our first attempt to soar into the realms of harmony," announced Joyce.

"With an accompaniment, that is," put in Mr. Clayton, *sotto voce*.

"With many accompaniments," corrected Joyce: "papa's sense and Mr. Maynard's science; Miss Allen's sensibility and Miss Clayton's smattering; two little boys, who have actually been proved to have once sung the first line of a hymn rightly; and, finally, our great backbone, a harmonium."

"Very nice," said Mr. Blunt, absently. Everybody laughed.

"Come and have some dinner: I hear Hannah taking it into the dining-room," said Mr. Clayton, compassionately.

Clement's privileges in the house were those of a son and brother. He had won Mr. Clayton's heart

when he first came to them as a little holiday school-boy, by some resemblance, real or fancied, to a boy—older than Joyce—whom they had lost at about the same age. Mrs. Clayton was very well disposed to like any one who fell in her way, and whom she was expected to like; Joyce was delighted to have a fresh person to pet her, and, perhaps still more, to find some one with whom she could occasionally quarrel; and Clement, since the first month, had always been at home with his cousins, although, during the last year or two, they had seen little of him, especially since he had set up at Defforton as a lawyer. His mother kept him very closely with her, and Devonshire was too far from London to be convenient for Mr. Clayton's annual holiday.

No one could have been a better son than Clement, and that under trying circumstances. The same weight of selfishness seemed to have rested on the French sisters; but if it preponderated in either, it was in Mrs. Blunt, owing, probably, to the easier life she had led. She was capricious and self-pleasing to a degree, violent when thwarted, and expecting immediate obedience to her most unreasonable demands. Clement deserved great credit for yielding readily, when he felt that non-compliance did not rest upon a question of right or wrong, and for, on more than one occasion, displaying a firmness which was as little irritating to his mother as he could make it. It was not his fault if his course of life

was not, perhaps, the most advantageous for the formation of his character—rather, I should say, if it did not appear so to human eyes; for our own judgments on such matters are too one-sided to be trust-worthy, and well it is for us that the Hand which guides our path leads onwards in unerring love, in spite of our weak, resisting murmurs.

Joyce indulged, that evening, in her nearest approach to idleness—knitting; as they all sat, in the cool twilight, round the open window, and the scent of the freshly watered mignonette stole into the room. She underwent a good deal of bantering from Clement on the subject of her many avocations, but she took it all with good-humoured equanimity that evidently delighted him; and, indeed, the kindly, pleasant atmosphere was infinitely refreshing to him after the perpetual fret of his own home.

“I declare,” he said, “in spite of trees, birds, and country skies, this is a great improvement upon the Rectory, where last evening we all sat out in the garden until ten o’clock.”

“You have told us nothing about the girls,” Mrs. Clayton said, reproachfully.

“Dear Mrs. Clayton, it is a subject I venture upon with awe, especially if I am to deliver all the cousinly messages with which I am charged.”

“To be sure! I have been wondering at not hearing. What are the children growing up like?”

said Mrs. Clayton, laying down her worsted work, and looking greatly interested.

"What is Elsie like?" interrupted Joyce.

"You have asked me *the* question of the village, to which no one has ever yet been found able to give a satisfactory answer. I have heard people severally express their firm convictions that they are growing up into bears, boys, and blues. Mind you, I say nothing of the sort myself."

"Poor children! a good deal may be forgiven them," said Mr. Clayton. "How old is Anne?"

"Eighteen, as I know by reason of her birthday being yesterday, and my having to eat a lump of heavy, indigestible cake, which she had manufactured herself according to the family fashion."

"Then she is out?"

"Out! I don't know what she is out of—not ungainliness, I assure you. I believe poor Anne would thankfully return to short frocks, and leave the world and its troubles to Elsie."

"And Elsie?"

"Wonderfully pretty; growing more so every day; but as shy as a hawk. Bella, though she is but fourteen, is the most popular of the party; and very bad it is for her. I am convinced there is twice the good in Anne and Elsie that there is in Bella. There is always something about her that is not above-board. She sent her love to dear Aunt Emily and Cousin Joyce, and longs so much to see

them again. That meant, she would much like an invitation to London. Elsie was in the room, and I saw her give Miss Bella a look. I am sure that was the reason she sent no message herself: she said she could not see the use of people sending love over and over again: if your friends knew that they had it, they could not want to be so often reminded."

"She never will do it in a letter," put in Joyce.

"Go on, Clement," said Mrs. Clayton.

"Walter is still at Marlborough, and Rose is a strange, independent little monkey. There! I think I have finished the junior branches. As to Mr. Follaton, you know, Mrs. Clayton, that he never changes; and Miss Villars is as good, as self-sacrificing, and as undecided as ever."

"Which tyrannises over her the most now?" asked Joyce.

"Bella."

"From what you say of that young lady," said Mr. Clayton, making up his mind with a sigh, "it seems to me it might be as well for us to take her hint, and have her here for a time. What do you say, Emily?"

Joyce looked up in dismay, caught her father's expression, and checked the words of remonstrance which were on her tongue.

"Certainly, my dear," Mrs. Clayton answered placidly.

"Would your brother consent?"

"I don't know, I am sure. I suppose not."

"Mr. Follaton is difficult to move when once he has made up his mind," said Clement, glancing at Mrs. Clayton, and thinking how unlike was her mild, easy-going character to the shy, studious brother. "But if you do carry out these benevolent intentions, I can assure you that your charity will be put to the proof. By the way, I had forgotten what might answer the same purpose in another manner—one of the special messages with which I am charged, and this from Miss Villars, is the hope that Joyce will pay them a long visit as soon as she feels inclined."

A long "oh!" in the form of a groan, broke from Joyce.

"That would be very nice for you, my dear," said Mrs. Clayton. "Why do you say, 'oh'?"

"I beg your pardon, Clement. I believe I was only thinking of your description of that horrid child. I should not really mind it: the Rectory is very pretty, and I used to like Elsie."

"I see Joyce valiantly aflame as defender of Miss Villars, and general opposer of tyranny," said her cousin, laughing.

"Thank you; but you will not have that gratification. I could not possibly go."

"Why not, Joyce?"

"Papa! why, only think of the hundred and fifty irons there are in the fire just now."

"My dear, you alarm me! A tenth of the number would be sufficient to burn our fingers. Clement," said Mr. Clayton, rubbing his cheek ruefully, "can you form any conception of the misery of our condition?—July in London, and Joyce engaged in the multiplication of irons."

A little out of countenance, she said, "You know, papa, there is always a great deal to be done; my going away just now is simply impracticable." Then, as he only answered "Hum!" she continued, "The harmonium, to begin with."

"I never knew you cared about music," said her cousin.

"Nor do I; but somebody must attend to it, and mamma declares the buzz of a harmonium makes her quite ill. So what is to be done?"

"The Allens."

"If the Allens get the arrangement of things into their hands, papa, all will start wrong. Mr. Maynard is very doubtful of himself, so much so that if he is not backed up we shall be having double chants and all sorts of atrocities."

"Joyce has set her heart upon Gregorians, Clement. Ah, I don't wonder at your making a face; we shall be a very depressed congregation under their influence."

"I range myself among the Allen faction from this moment."

"Oh, there is no faction. You know papa better

than to expect to find such a thing in his parish. If he would only honestly like them himself, no one would think of opposing him."

"I should like to see Mr. Clayton brought into contact with our stiff-backed old Elmwood farmers. I wonder whether they would be as amenable."

"They can't be worse than Parker, the green-grocer," Joyce said triumphantly, "and papa has quite brought him round. Clement, I won't have you disliking Gregorians; you shall come to the practice to-morrow."

"My teeth will be set on edge for a week!" However, he made no further objection.

That night Joyce went up to her room feeling the fatigue of a busy day, and not a little of its excitement. In the afternoon, she had put off graver thoughts until she could have the undisturbed quiet of night to assist her in dwelling upon them; now that time had come, they seemed as far out of reach as ever. A hundred distracting fancies flitted through her brain, whenever she tried to turn her thoughts inward—dreams of usefulness, it is true, plans of charity, active work, but none the less absorbing and exciting, and opposed to self-examination. As she prayed, her mind wandered away, and several times she recalled it with a start. As she read, she thought of what she would do and say the next day. Joyce was too sincere and honest-hearted not to feel a pang of self-reproach as she collected her attention;

but she contented herself with the feeling, and did not pursue it deeper. It was very true that her plans were useful, her wishes good; none the less did she need to watch and pray, lest "cumbered with much serving," Mary's better part might not be hers.

The weather on the next day was as hot, though less sunny, and Mrs. Hewitt's predicted thunder-storm showed signs of approach. Joyce would very much have liked to have spent the early part of the morning, before her cousin went off to the city, at home with him; but having promised to see some sick people at that time, she gave up her own wishes without a murmur. Coming out of one of the houses, she met Miss Foster.

"Oh, Miss Clayton," began the little woman hurriedly, "I wanted so much to see you. I am so afraid you may be annoyed about that poor Lydia Baker."

Poor Miss Foster's "sos" were a continual irritation to Joyce.

"I am not in the least annoyed," she said; "but I think you are all treating that girl a great deal better than she deserves."

"I do really think—I can't be sure, of course—I dare say you know best—only I can't help thinking there is some good in her," said Miss Foster, hesitating painfully between her desire to mediate

for Lydia Baker and her fear of seeming to oppose her clergyman's daughter.

"She has not shown much of it," said Joyce, sturdily.

"No? don't you think so? She has always seemed to me to be so good to that old aunt of hers. And don't you think she is truthful?"

"Papa says you have been very good to her, at all events."

Miss Foster's face beamed all over with pleasure.

"Oh, thank you," she said; "I am so relieved to know he does not disapprove."

"Is she going to Mrs. Hewitt's sister, then?"

"No; Mr. Hewitt says he will not risk it. I believe Mr. Clayton was good enough to see him last night on the subject; but Mr. Hewitt had made up his mind, and he is very determined."

I cannot but say that Mr. Hewitt went up several steps in Joyce's opinion by this deference to her judgment; she said, a little triumphantly,

"I was sure it would not be safe. Then, what is to be done?"

"I have not decided. I wanted to consult you first of all; but I have some idea of taking her myself. You know, my little maid has to leave me. It is not settled," said poor Miss Foster, trying to find some shield for her own imprudence.

"Oh, Miss Foster!"

"Do you really think I am wrong?"

"It is offering a premium for ingratitude to all the school-girls."

The little woman sighed. She did not think her own single-handed place quite formed a premium. She was grieved beyond measure to oppose Miss Clayton; but her heart yearned over the poor, ignorant, headstrong orphan, and she would not desert her.

"I hope you will not mind?"

"Of course, I don't mind," Joyce answered magnanimously; "I am only sorry for you."

"Oh, that is nothing," Miss Foster said, her little faded face lighting up with eagerness. "I can do so little."

Joyce thought, on her way home, that she was the best of little women, and only wanted common sense, by which, it is possible, she meant a reliance upon her—Joyce Clayton's—judgment. But without this common sense she felt sure she would do great mischief in the district.

"Papa, all the world would be spoiled with sugar-plums if Miss Foster had things her own way!" she exclaimed that afternoon, looking up from letter-writing.

Mr. Clayton did not answer; he was thinking of Joyce, and not of Miss Foster. He could not help fearing that her character was losing, instead of gaining, the self-control and resting power which he believed it specially needed. Action, energy, the

work of the outer life, had for her so great a charm, it seemed to leave no space for the inner. Her father hesitated as to his own conduct. He might by a word have forbidden her to take part in many things that now absorbed her; but he was unwilling harshly to check the spring of bright usefulness which carried in it so much that was good; besides, hers was a nature which could scarcely be restrained from continual activity by any external trammels: she could and would obediently refrain from doing anything to which her father objected, but a hundred other things would instantly fill up the void. No; Mr. Clayton made up his mind, with a sigh, that Joyce had arrived at an age when, in such a conscience-matter as this, the control must come from herself, and that he could do no more than help her to the discovery that it was needed.

The cousins set out together that evening for the school-room, Clement giving himself the airs of a victim, and Joyce ruthlessly determined that he should endure everything that was to be endured. She would not see his piteously appealing expression when the Miss Allens took him under their especial patronage, and poured out their admiration of his voice, and their fears that Mr. Maynard might be a *little* too severe in his choice of music. When he had effected an escape, he watched with amusement his cousin's small, resolute figure standing by the harmonium, and evidently making her steady

influence felt upon the rather discursively inclined assemblage. With less knowledge of music than either of the assistants, she gave more useful help than any of the others; so that when Mr. Clayton arrived towards the end of the hour, he found actual practice going on, and even the Miss Allens toned down to sober work. His hearty sympathy always acted as a stimulus, and sent them away in spirits. Mr. Maynard could not but be aware for how much he was indebted to Joyce, and made her a little formal speech to that effect; and on their way home, in answer to her father's inquiring "Well?" she looked up with a bright, eager smile.

"We mean to be a grand success, papa. Walter Brett really has a capital voice."

"How did you manage your own?"

"Opened my mouth and sang mutely. My croak would have been too prominent among so few to have passed unnoticed. But I think you might offer Clement a small salary if he would take a permanent place in the choir."

"Thank you. I can only say, Joyce, I am glad you don't live at the Rectory. However, I am magnanimous enough to congratulate you. You acted like the fairy Order whom I learnt to respect in my childhood."

Joyce laughed; the subject was changed, and she chatted as pleasantly and intelligently about the last Academy Exhibition as if singing-classes and

parochial troubles had never existed. She thoroughly enjoyed that evening, when she could listen to conversation she liked, and hear politics discussed with some difference of opinion, and yet with thorough cordiality of expression.

Clement wished them all good-bye that evening. He was obliged to start in the middle of the night, his cousin declared, in order to catch the early steamer for Dieppe; and as he intended returning by a different route, they were not likely soon to see him again. But he suggested to Joyce that there was the Elmwood invitation remaining open for herself.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW FRIENDSHIP.

Oh, boy! of such as thou are oftenest made
Earth's fragile idols; like a tender flower,
No strength in all thy freshness, prone to fade,
And bending weakly to the thunder-shower;
Still, round the loved thy heart found force to bind,
And clung like woodbine shaken in the wind!

HON. MRS. NORTON.

ST. SWITHIN was favourable, and Clement Blunt had a delightful passage. When he landed, his first step was to procure breakfast, for he felt a conviction that a hungry young Englishman would scarcely prove a welcome visitor to his aunt at such an hour of the morning. His next was to find out her house, and in this he had little difficulty. He turned up a little passage at the back of the hotel, stopped for a few minutes to look at the exquisite ivory carvings in the shops, and found himself in the main street. Referring to a letter in his pocket, and asking his way in French so perfect that the man he accosted was left in a state of bewilderment between Cle-

ment's appearance and accent, he soon found himself under the dark arch which led the unwary visitor over broken pavement and hidden pitfalls into the Sansons' house. He stumbled through a narrow passage into the open court already mentioned, and knocking at the door of the little glazed room, was immediately confronted by Madame Sanson.

It is impossible to conceive anything greater than her surprise in hearing a strange gentleman ask, in a voice as calm as if it were an every-day occurrence, for Madame d'Aurigny.

"Is it Madame you want—Madame?"

"She lives here, does she not?" said Clement, smiling at the evident astonishment his demand created.

"But yes—yes, certainly. Is Monsieur acquainted with her?"

"I am a relation."

"A relation!" Madame's hands, shoulders, eyes, were all in movement. "She has so few friends; Monsieur does not come from these parts?"

It was plain that Mr. Blunt's history would be extracted before any corresponding information was bestowed in return, and he resigned himself good-humouredly to his fate.

"No, indeed," he said; "I have just come from England."

"From England! Ah-h-h! that accounts for

Monsieur's foreign air; but yet he speaks altogether like a Frenchman?"

"I am half a Frenchman, if that will explain the mystery."

"And a relation of Madame's? Does she expect Monsieur?"

Mr. Blunt grew impatient. "Upon my word," he thought, "I had better adopt a little counter-questioning. My aunt does not expect me; will you kindly let her know that I am here?"

"Your aunt! Monsieur is Madame's own nephew! Is it possible!"

"Can I see her?" continued poor Clement, in despair.

"Sanson," cried Madame, running nimbly back to her husband, "figure to yourself, there is a gentleman, beautiful as a picture, describing himself as our Madame's nephew."

"Come," said Clement to himself, "this won't do. At the rate we are going on, I shall spend a few hours in detailing my history. I had better go up at once, while this wonderful little old woman is in her glass house. What a magnificent staircase! If my aunt's rooms are *en suite*, the cottage will offer few attractions."

He ran upstairs, and knocked gently at the door which opened on the landing. Receiving no answer, he tried again and again, but without better success. Finally, he turned the handle of the door. It was

locked, and he uttered an exclamation of disappointment. "She must be out; how tiresome! and what wonderfully early hours she keeps. It puts me in something of a fix, since, if I go down again, I shall be an hour in extracting a definite answer from that old woman; and if there is a thing I can't stand, it is the not getting a plain answer to a plain question. Ah, here she comes again," as a shrill "Monsieur!" was heard ascending from the court. "I shall go up another stage, and see what I can hear there."

The second stage was like the first, and Clement, pausing a moment to look up at the blue sky, and to note the peculiarities of the staircase, knocked again at a door exactly resembling that which he had unsuccessfully tried below. This time he had better fortune; a languid voice said, "*Entrez,*" and he found himself confronting a low couch, on which lay a boy looking so fragile and unearthly, that Clement absolutely started at the sight.

Louis was as much astonished as his visitor. He raised himself on his arm, and stared in wonder, until the gentleman, recovering himself, said with a short laugh, "I beg your pardon. I am altogether in a strange land here, and you will be doing me a kindness to direct me. I am in search of Madame d'Aurigny."

"Ah," said the boy, quietly, "I am sorry for that; for Madame is absent from home."

"Absent? I thought she never left this house."

"She has not for many years; but, two days ago, she went to Rouen."

Clement looked and felt terribly disconcerted. "Is she really gone?" he said, with an effort to be incredulous.

Louis smiled. "My sister is gone with her. I suppose you are one of Madame's English relations?"

"Yes," said Clement, in a pondering tone. He was thinking that he had got into an old enchanted castle, and that here was the captive knight laid under a spell in the turret-chamber. There was something in the house unlike the ordinary places where he found himself; and Louis' refined, delicate face belonged more to shadow-land than reality. "I beg your pardon," he said, rousing himself, and aware that the lad's eyes were fixed upon him in surprise; "but do you live here by yourself?"

"No, no, indeed," said Louis, with a smile, which broke out involuntarily at the idea; "I have Ursule—my sister. Only, as I tell you, she has gone to Rouen with Madame. Monsieur must be much vexed to come so far in vain. They will not be absent many days."

"Ah!" said Clement, brightening. "Then matters might be worse after all. My poor boy, you must be very desolate; who takes care of you?" he continued, in a tone of compassion.

"Oh, I have Madame Sanson—our good Madame down-stairs."

"The little old woman who asks questions?"

"I dare say it puzzled her to see you," said Louis, understanding the state of the case in a moment.

"Well," said Mr. Blunt, laughing, "I ought not to blame her; for I feel as if I must ask a great many questions myself before my ideas can be cleared of cloud. You are sure I am not tiring you?"

He was himself so strong and vigorous that it shocked him to see how fragile the boy looked, and how his cheek flushed with the slight exertion of talking; but there was no mistaking the tone of pleasure in which Louis answered,

"No, indeed. Pray do not go."

"First of all, then, tell me your name."

"Louis Lafon."

"Mine is Blunt—Clement Blant. Now we shall know one another better. And—and have you been long ill?"

He had not intended questioning the boy about himself; but there was a strange fascination to him in the sweet, almost womanly expression, unlike anything he had seen before.

"I have always been as I am." It was said quite simply, and without any attempt at self-pity; and Clement felt as if it would be almost an im-

pertinence for himself to venture upon anything of the kind.

"Then you know my aunt well?"

"Madame d'Aurigny? Oh, yes."

"What is she like?—I have never seen her."

"Nor I, Monsieur. I can only imagine her through Ursule's description."

"Surely we are not meaning the same person! I thought she lived here?"

"It is quite true; but Monsieur sees I remain up here always."

"She can come up, I suppose?"

Louis laughed merrily. "Monsieur does not, indeed, know Madame! She has never been up here in her life."

Clement began to make up his mind to be astonished by nothing in this strange house. His eye was caught by the sketches, and he fell to speculating whose they could be. The pictures and the delicately featured boy were equally out of keeping with the bare, poorly furnished room; nor did he sufficiently take into account the refining power of illness. He was, however, so much afraid of this, to him, unknown enemy, that it alarmed him to see the tired look in Louis' face; and he got up hastily to go, promising to return in the afternoon.

There was not much chance of successfully avoiding being caught at the foot of the stairs by Madame, whose little round figure, indeed, was

keeping watch at her door; but Clement was beginning to understand the state of affairs better, and was not unwilling to spend a little time in answering the remainder of her questions, and in listening to her shrewd remarks. She took care to impress him with her views on the subject of her lodgers, acknowledging, at the same time, that Madame d'Aurigny had her good points, and was much to be pitied.

"She has eaten her own heart, poor thing, so long, that there is not too much left. Well, well, we all laugh at this one, and find fault with that; but I sometimes say to Jules, 'You have your chocolate, and your soup, and your claret, and no wonder that you are amiable and satisfied; and I have my market, and my little gossip, and my house to look after, and the children up-stairs almost as good as my own, and how can we know what those poor things feel who are without any such distractions?'"

Clement felt as if there was some reproach to him in the words, although he had frequently tried to induce his mother to take measures for communication with her sister, and in vain. She told him, querulously, that one day she intended to go herself, and meanwhile he need say no more. That day had never, and now would never, come, and the two separated lives grew more apart each year. Clement was a good son; he felt a desire, in some manner, to make up for his mother's neglect, more and more so, as he extracted from Madame the particulars of

his aunt's mode of life, and felt that only rigid poverty could produce such absolute absence of comfort. Madame, on her part, lost her affections to the healthy-looking young Englishman; she embedded him at once in a soft, romantic little corner of her heart, which had been vacant ever since Pierre Renait's prudent but inconstant conduct had made her secretly indignant against him, while outwardly she was loud in his praises. There was a steadfast look in Clement Blunt's eyes, very different from Pierre's rather shifting expression.

But, as he went out of the archway into the sunny, busy street again, the gravity stole over his face which was most habitual to it; whether it was owing to living so much alone, as far as his inner life was concerned, or to the continual self-control which he required to exercise over his temper. He walked quickly on, although there was no cause for hurry, and he found himself by-and-by on the high land behind the old castle, and obliged to make rather an adventurous descent in order to reach the beach. A high westerly wind and a brilliant sun made the scene there as bright and animated as it was possible for it to be. The sea was of that peculiar green tint so often noticeable at Dieppe, growing darker and darker towards the horizon. The waves tossed themselves into white breakers, not angrily, but as if in play with the sea-birds which dipped gracefully into the foam, their wings becoming

silvery in the sunshine. Two women were chattering busily over their occupation, that of spreading nets to dry upon the stones; one of them wore a high white cap, scarlet petticoat, blue shawl and apron; children were shouting merrily against the wind, and the waves rolled noisily up the shingle. It was anything but a solitary resort, for far on to where the long pier, with its beacon-tower, ran out to sea at the entrance to the harbour, men, women, and children, of all ages and classes, were dotted over the shore; one or two ladies had sat down to enjoy the air, sheltering themselves from the wind behind umbrellas. Something in the strong salt wind, in the clear atmosphere, and the bright colours provoked cheerfulness; even the great boats, which in various stages of building and dismantlement were dragged up on the beach, were decked with flags to make their gaunt ribs look less gloomy. The sea was dotted all over with fishing-boats as far as the eye could reach, part of the fleet of which the town is justly proud. Looking in the other direction, away from Dieppe, the white cliffs seemed to Clement almost provokingly home-like, so closely did they resemble the English coast; and he needed to turn round and reconsider the most picturesque of the costumes to assure himself that he was indeed in a foreign country.

Clement Blunt deserved high praise for the manner in which he had toiled away in a small country office,

first giving up his favourite dream of entering the army, and then relinquishing all hope of the bar, because his mother could not endure to think of the time he must then necessarily have spent in London. It is possible that he might have risen high in that profession, as his quickness and readiness were great; but, if his talents did not meet with fair play in his position at Defforton, the advantage to his moral character had been incalculable. He had gained the comparative steadiness of application and regularity in work, which was what he most needed, and without which it is probable that all his more brilliant qualities would have failed; and he learned to reason closely, instead of doing no more than jumping at intuitions with feminine quickness and feminine want of logic.

He was thinking now of his home—thinking of the father who had been at once father and dearest friend, and whose loss every day of his life made only more apparent; thinking of the weariness, and disappointment, and want of sympathy that he felt too often now, as he had never before felt—of the brothers and sisters who had come before him, one by one taken away in infancy and childhood. It was not often that he had leisure time so thoroughly unoccupied as the present, and he sat down on the shingle and buried his head in his hands. That he suffered greatly from the struggle to reconcile his mother's capricious and jealous temper with the duty

and affection he owed to her, any kind clear-headed friend who lived on the spot would have easily seen; but, unfortunately, there was no one exactly in the position to remark or to help him in his trouble. Mr. Clayton had a better idea of it than any other person; but even he had not seen Clement and his mother together since Mr. Blunt's death, and did not know what a constant fret was imposed upon the young man's spirits. At times the longing to break away had proved almost irresistible, the more so when he allowed himself to think that he would really gain a great deal which now was to all appearance denied him. Mrs. Blunt was one of those persons with whom it is the present, and not the absent, who are always in the wrong; those who were separated from her by death or absence she endowed with all the virtues she had denied to them when they were near her. It was not that she did not love her one remaining son, but it was that the habit of her life impelled her to continual fault-finding.

Failures on Clement's part there had been—many and great failures—which had caused him hours of shame and self-reproach; but none the less had he fought his way through sharp struggles to a victory over self more complete than he himself believed, and it was no undeserved praise which the neighbours gave when they spoke of him emphatically as a good son.

Nevertheless, it was always a time of trial when he ventured upon a comparison between the Claytons' home and his own.

There are hours in a man's life when nature speaks more plainly than books, and something of the feeling came to Clement Blunt when he lifted his head and looked out over the water on that exquisite summer morning. The great boundless sea swept away petty repinings and discontent into full, deep assurance of the protecting Love which permits all things to be ennobled for its sake; the bright sunlight called up hope; even the clouds only brought the thought that they were but fleeting vapours, permitted for a time to dim the brightness. I suppose that few men, or women either, can look, as Clement looked, at sea and sky and remain wholly unmoved. He drew his breath deeply; and when at last he rose up to go, it was with the thankful feeling that strength had been sent to him in that hour of silent teaching.

He went back to the hotel, engaged rooms there for a few days, wrote letters during the remainder of the morning, and, when the afternoon came, set off according to his promise to see Louis again. The boy interested him more than he could account for, and called up all his feelings of compassion. He made up his mind that Ursule was a giddy girl, thinking only of her own pleasures so that she was ready to leave her brother in his suffering and soli-

tude, and set off without compunction to enjoy herself. It did not alter his opinion to hear the mingled pride and love with which Louis expatiated upon her.

"She is so fresh, so bright, so graceful, no one would ever suppose her to be my sister," said he, enthusiastically. "I cannot tell you how strange it seems to me to talk of Ursule to any one who does not know her. Everything comes to me through her, if you understand."

"Yes, indeed, my poor boy!"

Louis' cheek flushed. "Do not pity me for that," he said. "It is a hundred times better to enjoy it with her."

"Ursule is a strange name," Mr. Blunt said, ponderingly, "and yet it seems familiar to me in some shape or other."

"It is a name which has long belonged to us. My mother's mother was called Ursule."

"It is not possible, then, that I can know it as in any way connected with you," said Clement, smiling; "but it certainly strikes me as having to do with something which I ought to remember and cannot. Now I want to speak about yourself. Do you never see a doctor?"

"I have not seen one for a long time. Doctors can do me no good, Monsieur."

"You cannot be sure of that," Clement said, a

little peremptorily; "and your sister ought to take care that you have the chance."

Louis was greatly distressed. "You do not know Ursule!" he exclaimed; and this shadow of blame gave him such evident pain, that Mr. Blunt avoided, through the rest of the visit, expressing anything which seemed to reproach her with neglect, although in his own mind he still charged her with it.

"Well," he said soothingly, "I dare say she and you are both so used to your state that you think nothing can alter it. But skilful surgeons do wonders;" and he went on to narrate the particulars of a case with which he was acquainted, in which a boy a year or two younger than Louis had received a wonderful cure under the hands of a famous medical man. Glancing up as he drew towards the end of his story, and expecting to find the large dark eyes bent eagerly upon him, he was struck with the look of patient resignation which he met instead. He had hoped to rouse the boy into hopefulness, but he had evidently not succeeded, and he stumbled hastily over his last words to ask, "What do you think of that?"

"How thankful his mother must have been!"

"But about yourself; why should not the same treatment be successful?"

Louis answered him, without a trace of agitation in his voice, "Because it is too late."

"How can you tell? Every means ought to be tried——"

"I wonder if I could tell you," interrupted Louis, with more emotion: "I do not speak of it to Ursule, and there is no one else. To tell anything to Madame is a sure means of having it known. But sometimes I feel a longing, a craving, to speak to some one. I ought to be able to bear my own burden, but I am so weak——"

"Tell me anything; it shall be quite safe," said Clement, compassionately, as the boy stopped.

"Yes; I see that in your face. Well, it is not much; it is only poor Ursule who will be the worse. But you talked to me about getting well, and I know, I feel, that I am dying. It is better, sometimes, to put it into plain words," he went on hurriedly, seeing that Clement looked shocked and was trying to speak. "And I do not fear it now. I used to fancy that one day I might get better, and then it seemed hard, and made me impatient. Now that I feel how mistaken I was, and that at the best I could be no more than what I am, I know that it is all mercy."

His voice was quite calm, and as he concluded there came over his face such a look of peace and trustfulness that Mr. Blunt dared not at once disturb it. But in a minute or two he said, hesitatingly,

"Madame Sanson does not think you more ill than usual?"

"No. There is nothing especially the matter; only I know that every day I become weaker. It is very strange that I should have told you all this," said Louis, with a smile at his new friend.

"It is much more strange that you should have kept this feeling to yourself, and that no one should have been able to find it out," Clement said warmly. "But now you must let me take you in hand. I shall bring a doctor to see you to-morrow morning. Hush! you must say nothing against it; it will be my affair, not yours. I must have something to employ myself about while I am waiting for Madame d'Aurigny; and if we can set you up—who knows?—it will be worth staying longer for."

Louis shook his head, but did not oppose him further; and Clement turned the conversation, talking on to the boy about England and English matters in a manner which, while it amused, did not fatigue him by calling for much reply. In the little he said, he was surprised to find thought beyond his years, and to discover that the books he had read, though few, were good of their kind. Clement was half provoked at the manner in which everything was referred to Ursule, against whom his prejudices deepened the more, as he charged her in his own mind with blindness and indifference to her brother's condition.

The morrow came, and with it Mr. Blunt and the doctor. The latter was a man of few words: he

asked certain questions, prescribed more nourishment than medicine, and said no more till Clement was alone with him in the street. Even then he showed his opinion more by a quick characteristic gesture than by anything else; but it was unmistakable, and Clement felt that Louis' words were confirmed.

"Is he so ill?" he asked, much shocked.

"There is nothing—no constitution left."

"No hope?"

Monsieur Pelletier shrugged his shoulders again.

"But not immediate danger?"

"Certainly not. It is not definite illness, but gradual sinking."

Clement went back to Louis, dreading the questioning that he might have to undergo. He need not have feared: beyond a glance in his face when he entered, the boy asked nothing. He was perfectly patient and obedient, took what had been prescribed, and looked so animated and interested over some school reminiscences which Clement rubbed up for his benefit, that the latter began to persuade himself that the doctor was an old fool, and only gave up the case because he wanted the skill to treat with it.

Day after day Mr. Blunt spent hours in Louis' room. He smiled to himself more than once at the unexpected attraction he had found in the old house at Dieppe, partly owing, no doubt, to the new plea-

sure of being looked and longed for as he never before had been in his life. Louis was thoroughly happy in his visits, rested on the older man's stronger character, admiring it even when it showed sternness; listened unweariedly to his thoughts and opinions—which Mr. Blunt found himself detailing with an openness which astonished himself—and in his turn expatiated upon Ursule's excellences, or hesitatingly ventured to ask questions upon problems which had never yet been solved.

So the two lived on, perfectly contented with each other. Madame could not do enough to show her delight in the young Englishman who had thus opportunely come to cheer her boy's loneliness; for Pierre, although since Ursule's departure he had ventured once to go up and see his friend, was no longer dependable, and, indeed, between his misery and his satisfaction, which were now pretty well balanced in his heart, was not a very agreeable companion for any one. Clement was moved not merely by pity, but by real interest in the boy's character. It was, perhaps, too feminine and sensitive for healthy, manly work in the world; but this strain was never to be put upon it, and it was most lovable in its purity and perfect gentleness. If the life had borne its struggle—as what life does not?—it seemed to have left no scars to mark it, and, through all the weakness and suffering, there was an expression

of unruffled peace upon the beautiful boyish face to be traced even in his worst moments of pain.

There was as yet no change in his habits. Clement sometimes fancied that, at whatever cost to himself, he was bent upon no outward change being perceptible to Ursule when she returned. He still lay upon the little couch: when the day was very fine, he persuaded Clement to lift him into the balcony; nay, he still continued to paint Ursule's little cherry-girl, which he had begun before she went away, although more than once dropping the brush from exhaustion. Her letters were his great delight, so full and tender that Mr. Blunt's unfair prejudices almost melted away before them, and describing every incident of their journey sufficiently at length for her brother to be made acquainted with the minutest particulars, while the very fidelity of her descriptions rendered them picturesque. They were as fresh as Ursule herself; for she had scarcely written a letter in her life before, and wrote as she spoke, with a good many faults of expression, but a bright charm of originality to compensate for them. In his answers Louis had been asked by Clement to desire Ursule to keep his coming unknown to Madame.

Mr. Blunt and Louis were sitting together as usual one morning. Not many words had passed between them, for each was taken up with thinking over letters received that day. Louis' was, of course,

from Ursule, and was the last. That day she and Madame d'Aurigny were to return; and he lay back with a look of calm rest upon his face, such as Clement remarked and envied. His own letter was from his mother, full of blame for remaining away so long a time, of indignation with her sister for her absence, and of a recapitulation of the inconvenience to herself in not having her son with her. It was written in French, the old familiar language which she liked to talk and write with him, and it contained one injunction:—"Who is this Mademoiselle Ursule Lafon, whom you mention as travelling with your aunt? Find out." Clement read it, and would have asked a question or two to gain the information she required, but that, glancing up at the moment, he saw Louis looking so absorbed that he did not like to interrupt him, and went on with his letter instead. The inquiry did not seem to him of any great consequence, but Mrs. Blunt was peremptory, and would be sure to need an answer; he made up his mind, therefore, to ask Louis, by-and-by, for more particulars about his family.

Clement felt that his visit was drawing to an end. The object of his journey was to induce Madame d'Aurigny to join her sister in England, and from what he gathered from Louis and Madame Sanson he believed that there was little chance of success. Either way, he could not himself linger much longer, and the thought struck him with re-

gret. His few days of quiet life had been very pleasant to him; for to be with one so gentle and so single-minded as Louis was in itself a refreshment, and the surrounding atmosphere was a thorough change from that of his own home. It was hard to believe that his visit had been so short as was really the fact; but now, if anything reconciled him to its being brought to a close, it was the prospect of Ursule's return. He felt as if it must put an end to the quiet, close intimacy into which, in spite of the disparity of years, Louis and he had fallen, and with a sigh he made up his mind that this present peaceful morning would be the last.

Looking up at Louis to say something of the sort, he saw that he was asleep. It was not unusual, for his nights were disturbed, and short snatches of day-sleep frequently made his principal rest. Clement stole out of the room on tiptoe, having something to say to Madame. But he had not reached the bottom of the stairs before he became aware that something was seriously amiss in the little glass room. He hurried to the door, saw Monsieur standing with a fork in one hand and a saucepan in the other, the very picture of helpless bewilderment; and Madame, good-tempered, light-hearted Madame, actually crying as if her heart would break.

As soon as she perceived Clement, her sobs redoubled.

"Oh, Monsieur, such news, such terrible news!

Jules, why do you not inform Monsieur, when you see it is beyond me?"

"Terrible news, Monsieur," repeated her husband, like an obedient parrot, waving his head and the saucepan at the same time.

"What has happened?"

But Madame only went into another fit of sobs, and Mr. Blunt began to fear that he would never receive any information, when she suddenly checked herself, told Jules to put the things upon the stove, and then showed a little scrap of scrawled-upon paper which she had been all the while crumpling in her hand.

"Monsieur knows that Madame, his aunt, and Ursule were to return this day?"

"Yes—well?"

"There has been a frightful accident—frightful!" repeated Madame, becoming excited again.

"An accident! To the train?"

"To the train."

"How do you know? What have you heard? Who is hurt?"

"Hurt, Monsieur? They are all either hurt or killed. Oh, my poor dear child!"

Clement turned pale, but he was lawyer enough to know that so sweeping an assertion contradicted itself. "Impossible!" he exclaimed. "Has that slip of paper anything to do with the matter. Pray let

me know everything as quickly as possible. There is that poor boy to be thought of. Good Heavens, how terrible!"

"Oh, is it not, Monsieur? And I just getting poor Madame's room ready for her; and I persuaded her to go!"

"Let me see," repeated Clement, impatiently, holding out his hand for the paper. "Why," he exclaimed, glancing rapidly over it, "this is from Mademoiselle Lafon herself. She is not killed, at all events."

"No, Monsieur," returned Madame, a little indignantly; "but look at the writing, and judge what her condition must be."

"Oh, that is nothing," said Mr. Blunt, much relieved. "I dare say she was shaken enough. She says she is unhurt herself, and that she hardly knows as yet what injury my poor aunt has received. How did this come?"

"Auguste Pasquier brought it here. He was one of the poor creatures in this horrible train."

And, by little and little, it came out that the accident, whatever it was, had occurred at no great distance from Dieppe, and that as soon as possible those who were comparatively unhurt had been forwarded to their destination. Ursule had seen a face she recognised among the frightened passengers, and had entreated him to take a few hastily scribbled

lines to the Sansons, hoping by this means that a positive assurance of her safety would reach Louis before he had time to be alarmed. If she was, as she twice repeated, unhurt, she was evidently sorely shaken and confused, and could scarcely write coherently. Clement's first impulse was to hurry to the station; then he remembered that, in Louis' condition, it was scarcely prudent to leave the task of breaking the tidings to Madame's discretion, and he resolved to carry the note to him himself. Directly he saw him, he perceived that he must use great caution; for Louis' eyes were fixed eagerly upon the door, as if a strange secret sympathy told him that something was wrong. Mr. Blunt at once put the note into his hands.

"This is from your sister herself," he said; "it is to tell you that the train has been delayed, and that she is quite unhurt, although there has been a sort of accident."

The boy's hand trembled so much that he could scarcely hold the paper.

"Poor Madame is injured?" he said, looking up with a horror-struck expression.

"I fear so; but it may not be much. Of course, she is frightened. I am going at once, and shall bring them back as soon as possible."

"Take care of Ursule," said Louis, faintly.

"Take care of yourself, my boy; that is the best thing you can do for her."

His heart smote him at having to leave him, but he felt he could not linger. He begged Madame to go up at once and cheer him; and she, having rapidly recovered from the shock of her first impressions, was likely to prove a hopeful comforter.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACCIDENT.

Who knows when he is to go from home

He parts from his door

Of when, or how, he back shall come,

Or whether ever more?

For some who walk abroad in health,

In sickness back are brought;

And some who have gone forth with wealth,

Have back return'd with nought.

GEORGE WITTEN.

The station was in a state of suppressed excitement, and Mr. Blunt found it impossible to do more than pick up straws of information, often contradictory; for the officials were too busy to answer questions, even from those most deeply interested in the matter, and the utmost they ever permitted themselves to say was to the effect that they hoped the accident was not so serious as had at first been feared. Larger white-faced printers crowded into the station as the tidings became more widely spread; wives, mothers, children, huddled together crying

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Departeth from his door,
Or when, or how, he back shall come,
Or whether never more?
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In sickness back are brought;
And some who have gone forth with wealth,
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GEORGE WITHERS.

THE station was in a state of suppressed excitement, and Mr. Blunt found it impossible to do more than pick up atoms of information, often contradictory; for the officials were too busy to answer questions, even from those most deeply interested in the sufferers, and the utmost they ever permitted themselves to say was to the effect that they hoped the accident was not so serious as had at first been feared.

Eager white-faced inquirers crowded into the station as the tidings became more widely spread; wives, mothers, children, huddled together crying

and talking, waiting for the train which was momentarily expected to bring in more of the victims, or for that which was to start immediately after its arrival for the scene of the disaster. A young husband, whose wife had been in the train, paced frantically up and down the platform; porters hurried by the groups, whose misery they disliked encountering with nothing of comfort to offer; one or two doctors came quickly into the station, Louis' M. Pelletier among them. Presently the train came in, and a general rush was made to the spot. Clement stood on one side to let the women look eagerly into the carriages. Even to himself, the anxiety of the moment was sickening; what must it be to them? He touched the doctor's arm, and asked him to point out Ursule Lafon, if he saw her; but it seemed almost a superfluous precaution, for he felt sure he should recognise her and Madame d'Aurigny by instinct. A great white-capped fish-woman pushed past him, the basket on her back almost striking his face. She was searching for her husband, and Clement never forgot the look of agony in her eyes when she had convinced herself he was not there. Not very many passengers got out, and the greater number had received hurts of some kind, although in several cases these were but slight: almost all looked pale and scared, and scarcely able to respond to the joyful greetings which were lavished upon them. The young husband found his wife; but when he poured

out a torrent of rapturous delight, she burst into tears, as if the reaction were more than she could bear; and the doctors were obliged to interfere to prevent the shattered sufferers from being overwhelmed by the heart-rending questions and lamentations of those whose friends were still among the missing.

Presently, and as soon as the excitement had a little subsided, it was found out that the train was going to start on its return journey to the scene of the accident. Clement jumped into a carriage where were a gendarme, a couple of men in blouses, M. Pelletier, and two or three women. As the train moved slowly off, even the most vehement grew quiet. Those next the windows stretched out their heads, as if already expecting to see traces of what had happened; one of the women—the wife, as Clement afterwards discovered, of the stoker—sat with her hands clasped, mute and rigid with terror; another, recovering from the first awe, began to pour out prophecies and surmises to her neighbour. The sun was shining, the English-looking orchards and hedge-rows were steeped in the delicious quiet of a summer afternoon; the women at work in the fields looked calmly up at the train as it dashed past them, unconscious of what had come to pass, not many miles away from their peaceful homes.

Once the speed slackened; the women shrank together. Clement looked inquiringly at M. Pelletier,

who had been occupying himself with making notes in a pocket-book. He shook his head as he caught the Englishman's eye.

"We have not gone the distance yet. Monsieur is interested in some one?"

"My aunt, I fear, is injured; she is travelling with the young girl with whom Monsieur is acquainted—Mademoiselle Lafon."

"Ah!"

The doctor went back to his pocket-book; silence fell upon all, even upon the least affected. A few more miles of trees and fields, and windmills crowning the highest points, and the train slackened speed again, went slowly, more slowly, stopped. The gendarme and the doctor kept back the women, who were for pressing out. No one was allowed to descend until the guard came to give leave, nor could anything be seen from the windows, crowded as they were with anxious faces. When at length they were released, they found there was still a little distance to walk before the spot was reached. A few set off running; others hung back as if they could not face their fears. Clement pushed on with the doctor.

They came upon the scene at last. The engine lying on its side, buried deep in the soft earth of the embankment, all the green grass blackened and scorched by the water from the boiler; the carriages, some standing erect and untouched, others pounded

into a thousand pieces; great wheels sticking out of shattered planks; rails torn up and bent, telegraph wires twisted round fragments of carriages. The doctor hurried on.

"Plenty of work for us here," he said to Clement. "What an accident!"

What an accident, indeed! It was very simply explained afterwards: a little carelessness on the part of some workmen, and the train ran off the line. It had happened three hours before, and the greater part of those who were in the carriages had been removed to a farm-house fortunately near; some had not yet been extricated; only one was known to be dead—the stoker. One of the officials hurriedly told them this. Two medical men were at the farm-house, and he thought that monsieur le docteur would do well to stay and give assistance to the poor creatures who were yet to be got out. He showed them where the workmen were labouring at great masses of splintered fragments, and they hastened to the spot. One man was released just as they reached it: the doctor poured brandy down his throat, and superintended placing him on a rude kind of litter, which had already served to carry others to the house. The remaining sufferer was a woman whom the men did not believe to be much crushed, although a large piece of machinery had fallen in such a manner as to render the task of extricating her extremely long and difficult. The

instant Clement saw that a young girl was standing by her side with a face of the utmost distress, by turns encouraging her and imploring the workmen to be careful, he guessed who it was. The next moment, the doctor touched his arm, and said,

"Tenez, there is Mademoiselle Ursule!"

This was no time for explanations; it is doubtful whether Ursule would have understood him had he attempted them, for she had eyes and ears only for one object. He could but aid her by joining the men, and, under the doctor's directions, working with all his might at the rescue. Poor Madame d'Aurigny was not sensible throughout; at times she appeared conscious of her situation, and then, with a groan, would close her eyes again: when at length she was released, and the men stood wiping the big drops from their foreheads, Ursule would have passionately embraced her; but the doctor put her aside, not unkindly, but with an air of prompt decision.

"Perfect quiet, if you please, Mademoiselle! You will do best now by going as fast as you can to the farm, and seeing that all is ready by the time we arrive. Monsieur will remain here to assist."

She had the good sense to be obedient, although the strain upon and shock to her nerves had been so great that she felt and moved like one in a dream. It was not until she was close upon the house that she became conscious that her dress was

torn and slit in all directions, and that her whole body ached with a dull dead pain. The mistress of the farm, a kindly faced woman in a snowy high cap, ran out to meet her before she had crossed the yard, and kissed her in the hearty, tearful eagerness of her welcome.

"Oh, you poor child!" said she, "what must you not have gone through! Come in—come in! Yes, I know all about it; have they got out the poor creature?—there is a place waiting for her, and the best of doctors. Come, and let me see to yourself."

But Ursule refused all assistance until she had seen Madame d'Aurigny brought in and laid on a mattress, and had undressed her and heard M. Pelletier's report. She had escaped wonderfully, in his opinion, as far as yet could be told; but he was not altogether sure that she had not received an injury of some sort to the back, and this, of however slight a description, became a serious matter when her age was taken into account. Restoratives had entirely brought back consciousness; but she was in a painfully nervous and restless state, and for two or three hours Ursule could do nothing but attempt to soothe her, until M. Pelletier, coming in again to visit her, and a little girl of about twelve years old, who was the other occupant of the tiny room, administered some quieting medicine, and she fell into an unbroken sleep.

Nurses had been telegraphed for, as well as doctors. One, in the dress of a Sister of Charity, came softly in to take Ursule's place; and the girl, exhausted herself, and longing to know more of the condition of her fellow-travellers, stole on tiptoe out of the room.

The whitewashed, red-tiled farm was put to its utmost to meet these unexpected and sad demands upon its hospitality. Twelve persons had found refuge there, of whom at least eight were more or less seriously injured, and friends, doctors, and nurses added to the numbers. The good mistress and her three daughters worked unceasingly to supply all that was needed: no one could do enough to show their pity and sympathy. The kitchen, with its goodly ranks of shining dishes, had been hastily fitted up with beds and palliasses; the best linen dragged sweet and fresh out of the great press for the use of the sufferers. Rough men moved noiselessly about; a big, fierce-looking, bearded gendarme tenderly dandled a little child before its mother's eyes, that she might assure herself of its safety. All the windows were set open; the soft, pure air stole in, just stirring the blind; the sunlight fell in golden streaks upon the stained deal floor, and outside the cows were lowing impatiently because milking-time had come and passed.

Jeanne, Dorothee, and Louise, healthy, honest-looking girls, were greatly interested in Ursule,

who was of about the same age as themselves. The state of her dress and her white face horrified them, and Dorothée was at once for carrying her off to her own room and lending her some clothes.

"Let me stay one moment," pleaded Ursule earnestly; "I want to know how they all are. Who is in this room?"

"We cannot go in there," said Dorothée, in a frightened whisper, laying her hand upon the lock, lest Ursule should open the door; "*he* is there, and the poor wife, too."

"He? Who?"

"The stoker—the poor man who was killed."

"Ah!"

Ursule said no more, but suffered herself to be drawn away: she had not heard of this one death, and it shocked her inexpressibly. She followed her guide through a long passage which led to another part of the house, when they were stopped by the mother's voice calling Dorothée in imperative accents.

"How tiresome!" said the girl, hurriedly. "However, my mother will not keep me. Wait for me one moment. There, sit in this window-seat until I come back."

Ursule sat down as she was told: she was so weary that she could not object to anything. She rested her arms upon the sill and looked out. The country was too level to be picturesque in form, but

it possessed a smiling summer beauty of its own—undulating fields of corn just beginning to be touched with yellow ripeness, orchards nestling round the house, a glimmer of water in the distance, long shadows and rich ruddy sunset lights on earth and sky. It was all there, but she could see nothing of it—nothing but the one scene that seemed to be branded upon her mind, and to grow more distinct every moment. She shut her eyes—in vain: she saw only the more clearly that dreadful, shattered heap of splinters, and the faces of deadly terror surrounding her. She had never in her life fainted, but she was very nearly doing so now, and only a determined effort prevented it. Suddenly some one addressed her.

“How is Madame d’Aurigny?” said the voice.

“Asleep,” answered Ursule, mechanically.

“I am afraid that you are suffering yourself, Mademoiselle?”

“Oh, that is nothing. At least,” said she, standing up and pushing back her hair with both hands, “one must suffer when one thinks of it.”

She fancied he was one of the doctors, until, glancing up, it struck her with a dull wonder that she had seen his face before. Suddenly she exclaimed,

“Ah, now I remember! Was it not you who were so good in helping us?”

“I had the best of reasons,” said Clement, smiling;

“I am Madame d’Aurigny’s nephew.”

“Her nephew! What? are you the Monsieur Blunt of whom Louis writes? Oh, Monsieur, then you have seen Louis?”

“Yes, indeed, Mademoiselle; I have been sitting with him this morning. I was with him, indeed, when your little note was brought.”

“And was he frightened?—did he understand? Oh, Monsieur, why did you come away?—I beg your pardon; I forgot.”

“He has your note, remember. And about his hearing to-night?”

“Ah, yes; what can we do?”

“I will tell you. M. Pelletier returns to Dieppe this evening, and has promised to take charge of a message from you. Or, if you think you can write a few lines, it might be better. Here is a slip of paper,” continued Clement, tearing a page out of a pocket-book.

She thanked him gratefully, and managed with some difficulty to write a few words to repeat the assurance of her own safety.

“M. Pelletier will see Louis himself,” said Mr. Blunt, “and can explain the state of the case to him as no one else could do. But I am sure you ought to be taking rest yourself.”

“My mother says she must do so at once,” said Dorothée, who had just returned, looking anxiously at Ursule. “Soeur Monique is with the lady; and if

she leaves her, I or one of my sisters will go in and watch."

"I must not be long away," said Ursule absently. But she made no further resistance when Dorothee put her arm in hers and drew her towards her room, and, indeed, her strength seemed to have all at once deserted her. She lay down on the only little bed left in the room, which had not been called into service below; and her kind companion, hoping that she would soon sleep, placed a dress of her own close to the bed, drew the white window-blind to exclude the light, and went softly out. It was very quiet and peaceful in the little room, far removed from the painful bustle below stairs. Nothing reached Ursule's ear but the occasional sound of some of the farm animals and the monotonous hum of insects in the acacia tree outside the window. Yet she could not sleep. Her eye wandered backwards and forwards, from the homely scanty furniture to the gay little prints upon the walls, though afterwards she could not recollect their subjects in the least, so uncomprehending had been her gaze. She had not lain down for more than a quarter of an hour, when she longed to get up again; the stillness and quiet, instead of soothing, seemed to oppress her. She even tried to rise, but her limbs ached so wearily that she gave way, and stretched herself again upon the bed with a sigh.

Nevertheless, although she was unable to sleep,

by-and-bye the rest began to have a beneficial effect, the stupor-like feeling to pass off, and her ideas to detach themselves from that one fixed point round which they all revolved. She began to think not so much of the peril as of the escape—not so much of the sudden crash, and confusion, and horror, as of the Mercy which had protected her in the very jaws of death. Religion was to her such an impersonal thing, that what to others would have been an immediate and spontaneous thought came like a new sensation. She always believed that she ought to be “good,” but it was the first time in all her life that a real glow of thankful childlike love went up from a full heart with the words of thankfulness she uttered. What would have become of Louis had she been killed? What would have become of herself? Ursule shuddered and hid her face in her hands, for there was the most dreadful thought. Like a lightning flash her life seemed to start out before her with all its shortcomings, its wasted hours, its carelessness, its impatience. What had she ever done to win her father back? Nothing. She had treated him with angry contempt, which could but have the effect of making him more dislike his home. It was true that she was more angry for Louis’ sake than her own; but her newly stirred conscience asked itself whether a passionate love for Louis ought to swallow up her duty to her father, and there could be only one answer. How much had

she done from a sense that it was right? how much because it was pleasant? How had she controlled her temper?—was it by this time in better keeping than a year or two ago? And now—if she had been cut off!

It was not the first time that such questions had arisen in her mind. They are merciful messengers, sent often to knock at the door of our hearts; and alas for us if the time ever arrive when they come no more! But Ursule had never honestly answered them. She had put them aside, or satisfied herself with some half-formed resolution; and now, when for the first time in her life she began to see herself as she was, when there flashed before her the first real idea of what life really is, of what our enemy is, of what the struggle, and the battle, and the race must be—now even that faint picture must have overwhelmed her, if with it had not come the happy sense of grateful love, the thankfulness for a great deliverance, the belief that He, who in mercy had spared her, would forgive, and help, and strengthen.

The light faded away out of the little room, a fresh breeze sprang up, the white window-blind flapped backwards and forwards. Presently Dorothee came, a candle in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other.

“Ah!” she exclaimed, looking at Ursule with satisfaction, and then kissing her, “one can see by your face that you have had a good sleep.”

"I have not slept," said Ursule, cheerfully; "but I am quite rested. Only, do you know, you must be kind enough to pull me out of bed. My bones are so wonderfully stiff that I really don't think I can move in any other way."

"But what! Who ever heard of such a thing! You are not to get up, I assure you. One of my sisters and I mean to take turns in sleeping on the floor; but we shall not disturb you. Louise has been obliged to go out, and make the women see after the poor beasts: the stupid creatures could do nothing but crowd round the door and stare, or go off to that terrible place. There, how foolish I am!" she said, seeing Ursule change colour. "Jeanne told me to say nothing about it. Do not think of getting up. Madame is well cared for."

But Ursule was so bent upon it that the good-natured Dorothee could hold out a very little time against her. She dressed her in a stout gown of her own, and insisted upon doing everything for her, the consequence of which was a loud "Ah!" which made Ursule look up and ask, with a smile,

"What is it?"

"Your arm. It is black—it is dreadful to see!"

"It is only a bruise; it goes down my side. Think what it is to have escaped with no more than a bruise. How—how is that poor thing, the wife?"

"Jeanne said you were not to talk about it," said Dorothee, doubtfully.

"Tell me," said Ursule, coaxingly.

"She is broken-hearted. She does not cry, but sits and looks at him without a word. None of us like to go in, it is so terrible to see. There, now you are one of us. Shall I lend you my fête-day cap? The satin ribbons are quite new."

Ursule declined the cap, in spite of this commendation, and the two girls went down together to Madame d'Aurigny's room first, where Sœur Monique, with her sweet, placid face, was sitting by Madame's side, talking in a low, soothing tone. The child was sleeping; a tiny lamp burned on the table; everything was in exquisite order. Dorothee stayed outside the door; at a sign from the Sister, Ursule went eagerly in.

"Ah, dear Madame!" she whispered, bending over her with tears in her eyes, "are you better now?—in less pain?"

"Pain, child? If you had any perception, you would know that the pain is dreadful. You have been a long time in coming to inquire for me. Go away now. Sœur Monique interests me, and I do not wish for interruptions."

Ursule drew back with a sigh. She said something in an under-tone to the Sister, who nodded her head after a moment's consideration.

"Go away, child," repeated Madame, imperiously.

"Dear Madame, in one moment," said the girl,

gently. "Do you know that a gentleman has come here to seek you from Dieppe?"

"A gentleman?—who then?"

Madame mentally ran over the names of those whom she once had known. Had any of them actually sought her out now?

"Quick, *dîtes donc*, who?"

"He says he is Mr. Blunt. He comes from England; he is your nephew."

"My nephew—Félicité's son? Bah! it is impossible. Send him in at once, that I may see."

Her voice was agitated, and Sœur Monique rose and bent over her.

"You must not excite yourself," she said, in her calm, decided tone. "It will be better for you not to see him until to-morrow."

"You are right," said Madame d'Aurigny, wearily putting her hand to her head. "Ursule would have understood it also, if she had any consideration."

"And you do not like me to stay," said Ursule, reluctantly preparing to leave her.

"No, no, certainly; I wish for no one but Sœur Monique. You only fatigue me."

The kind Sister saw the girl's look of disappointment, and followed her to the door.

"It is very common, this irritability," she said in a low voice; "you need not think she means what she says. After such a shock, the whole system is in a highly nervous condition, and we

doctors are not surprised at anything that the patient fancies."

"I am not surprised," said Ursule, sadly; "because I know I often irritate her. Only——" She did not conclude her sentence, for she could not say that she had been hoping now to grow more patient and forbearing.

"Ah, to-morrow," said the Sister, cheerfully, nodding kindly as she returned to her charge.

"To-morrow? What is that Sister Monique says about to-morrow?" said the mistress of the farm, bustling up to them. "I am sure it is as much as one can do to provide for to-night. I do not know what to do about that poor young wife. Père Martin has been with her, and he left her, as he thought, comforted; but she is as bad as ever again now. I would stay with her if they did not want me in the kitchen. Dorothee, can you not go in? She ought not to be left alone, as she is."

Dorothee shrunk back. She was as kind-hearted a girl as could be found, but quite unfitted for such a task as that of comforting the young widow.

"Well," said her mother, compassionating her fears, "I must get Jeanne."

"May I try?" asked Ursule, timidly.

Mother and daughter cried out at the idea; but when she urged it intreatingly, it was really too welcome an offer to be refused. With a tremulous throbbing of her heart at the thought of the sorrow

she was about to encounter, she followed the good woman to the door of the little room. It was ajar, and Madame Pichot was just going to push it open, when she held up her finger in token of silence. A man's voice was audible within, speaking very calmly and steadily.

"The saints preserve us," said Madame. "It is the young Englishman. Look!"

She held the door so that Ursule could look in. The wife had thrown herself upon the ground, by the bed on which her husband's body was laid, burying her head in her hands. Clement stood with his back to the door, from time to time gently saying a few sentences—not his own, but the beautiful words of eternal promise, which generation after generation have comforted the mourner's heart. And Madame, listening intently for some minutes, turned round to Ursule and whispered, her own eyes wet with tears, "She will do now, the poor child! I can hear her crying."

The women stole away, Ursule with a strong impression that Mr. Blunt must be "very good," but a second time disappointed in her hope to be of use. There was nothing now for it but obedience and a long night's rest in the little far-away room; and though hour after hour passed without sleep, it came at last in the early morning, and unquiet dreams of crashing trains melted away into unbroken and refreshing rest.

The next day, things resumed their more natural course. All the sufferers, except three, were sufficiently recovered to be removed to their homes. The mother of the little girl came to fetch her; and such a happy chattering broke forth in Madame d'Aurigny's room as Sœur Monique's authority was powerless to check. Ursule and the girl stood upon tiptoe, and peeped in at the door to see the pretty meeting—the child's burst of delight, and the mother's grateful look of intense relief. Even Madame d'Aurigny grew interested, and wished them a gracious good-bye; and quite a little triumphal procession escorted the doctor across the yard when he carried the little girl himself and placed her in the carriage.

"*Bon jour*,"—" *Bon jour*,"—" *Au revoir!*"—"A thousand thanks!" were called out while the carriage continued within hearing distance, and then handkerchiefs were waved until long after it had gone out of sight.

"I declare," cried Louise Pichot, twirling herself round, "this affair has marvellously enlivened us, after all."

"Louise, Louise!"

"Well, Jeanne," she said, penitently, "I know it was very dreadful. But you must own it is good to see such happiness as that; and it is good to have Ursule."

"It cannot be good to rejoice over anything that brings so much sadness," said Jeanne, resolutely.

Louise looked unconvinced.

"Do you not think, Mademoiselle Jeanne," said Clement, joining in the conversation, "that the deeper our sympathy, the more readily it will answer to any call made upon it? I mean," he continued, perceiving that he was not quite understood, "that your sister would have been as much wanting in kindness if she had refused to be glad over that mother's delight just now, as if she had felt no sorrow for the poor thing in yonder."

The grave Jeanne shook her head. "I should not care for people's sorrow for me, if they forgot it directly," she said.

"And I would much rather they did as Monsieur says," exclaimed Louise, who seldom ventured to contradict her sister, but now tasted the delight of having a champion.

"I think that must be the best, because it is the hardest," put in Ursule, in a low voice—"the hardest to practise always, I mean. Sometimes one feels more quickly with people in sorrow, and sometimes with those in joy; but it must be very difficult always to throw oneself into their case."

"Sœur Monique does that," said Dorothee, pausing in her knitting. "Did you see how pleased and happy she looked when the little thing flung her arms round her neck? And yet no one can feel more in trouble than she does."

"Louisette," interrupted Jeanne, "what will our

father say if the milk-cheeses are not ready for to-morrow's market? Come, we must go into the dairy."

"And I must go back to the house," said Dorotheé. "Stay out a little longer, Ursule; the orchard is pleasant at this time of day—the air will do you good."

If Ursule expected Mr. Blunt to follow the three sisters into the sunny-looking old farm, framed in timber, like so many of the Normandy houses, she was mistaken. He turned with her towards the orchard, and was the first to speak.

"Madame d'Aurigny is really better, you think?"

"Oh, I hope so," she said, brightly; "I believe she is recovering from the shock. It has been such a wonderful escape! Do you know," she continued, in a changed, awe-struck voice, "that our compartment was really crushed to atoms?"

"Did you feel anything of what was coming? But perhaps I ought not to ask you, or let you dwell upon it."

"Everybody says that," said she, with a touch of impatience; "and, after all, it is worse to keep it to oneself always. No; I don't think I had time to feel more than just an instantaneous impression of something being wrong. I don't remember anything whatever before I found myself lying on a bank, wondering how I came there, and what was

going on all round me. The horror was when I looked up and could see nothing of Madame."

"The marvel with such an accident is that so little mischief was done. I went this morning, very early, to examine into it a little more closely."

"Ah?"

She looked at him with eager eyes of inquiry.

"Oh, the line is passable now, and the rails mended. But it will take some time to clear away the remains. When do you think my aunt will be ready to move?"

"Not for a day or two," she said, quickly; "certainly not."

Mr. Blunt looked at her with some surprise. He thought she would have been anxious to return to Louis; and his hard thoughts of her carelessness for him returned. "Your brother will be very much disappointed," he said, coldly.

Her eyes filled with tears, but she kept her face determinedly turned away that he might not see them, quick enough to read his impression, and too proud to exculpate herself, by saying what was indeed the truth—that as yet she could scarcely endure the thought of another journey.

"How did you think Louis was, Monsieur?" she asked at last, with some difficulty.

"Very weak, certainly."

"Did Madame Sanson think him more weak than usual?" she said, anxiously.

"She did not exactly say so." Clement's fixed idea was making him very pitiless.

"Oh, Monsieur!" Ursule hesitated, stopped, and finally walked on again in the long soft grass. "Do you remain here long?" she said, abandoning her first intention.

"Only long enough to see my aunt home again. Do you think I could persuade her to go to England? My mother wants to have her there. You shake your head: you do not believe she would consent?"

"It is such a journey!"

"Well, we shall see; I shall not give up easily."

Shyly glancing at Mr. Blunt, she thought it probable that anything on which he set his mind would be carried out. She was sorry he had taken a prejudice against her, because she was inclined to be grateful for his kindness to Louis; but while at any former time she might have resented it, the events of the last twenty-four hours had softened and humbled her; and she only smiled to herself with a glad security in the mutual love which could be so misread.

Still it gave her an uncomfortable feeling in her companionship, and she was not long in making an excuse for returning to the farm, through the untidy yard, where a great strongly-built Normandy horse was being saddled to convey brisk dapper little

Monsieur Pichot to the house of a newly-married son, who lived some kilomètres away.

The girls in the dairy called to her to come and help them; and after she had ascertained that Madame d'Aurigny wanted nothing, she joined Jeanne and Louise in their pleasant occupation of pressing the rich thickened cream into moulds, to be left to turn sour and then ripen.

All that day and the next Madame d'Aurigny was imperative in her desire to have her nephew with her whenever she was able to bear any person in the room, while Ursule's attendance she as imperatively declined. There was the charm of novelty about Clement; he was not to be had any day; it was not unnatural that she should cling to his presence. She lavished kind words upon him, and made him sit where she could watch every movement. She was jealous of Ursule's so much as being in the room; and the girl bore her fancies with a patience and gentleness quite new to her. But Clement, seeing only the outside, concluded that she avoided the sick-room from selfish motives: he pitied from his heart his poor desolate aunt, who grasped so eagerly at his affection that he could not believe she would set aside any within her reach. He determined that Ursule only sought her own pleasure—that she had left Louis selfishly, for the sake of this expedition, and that she now avoided her kind

protectress in order to amuse herself with the girls of the farm.

It was a harsh judgment; but which of us has not suffered for our harsh judgments?

Three days passed—four days. Ursule wrote to Louis daily, long letters full of love, and bright with descriptions of all that went on at the farm—the butter-making and the bread-making, and Blanchette the calf, that knew her and came to eat out of her hand—the fresh pastoral life, so new to her—the dewy mornings, the calm evenings, the kindly people—concluding every account with, “If only you were here!” Clement would have melted towards her, had he seen those letters. Madame d’Aurigny to all appearances grew better. She sat up in her bed, moved to a chair, and, by-and-bye, came into the kitchen. At times, it is true, she was especially nervous and irritable, and she complained, not infrequently, of her back; but she had set her heart upon returning to Dieppe at the end of a week, and when the time came there was nothing, apparently, to prevent her. She was the last of the sufferers, and, as Louise said, they would feel quite desolate without any one to nurse.

“Dear Ursule,” said Dorothee, sadly, when they were all waiting at the door for the light covered cart which was to take them to the station, two miles off, “do not forget us.”

The girl’s answer was a kiss.

"You tremble so—are you ill?"

"And she looks like a sheet," put in Louise;
"worse than when she came!"

"It is nothing," said Ursule, determined to conceal her fears. "Come to see us some day."

"Ursule!" called Madame d'Aurigny; and, hurrying through her leave-taking, she ran out and seated herself in the cart behind Clement and Monsieur Pichot, who had insisted upon driving them to the station himself.

CHAPTER IX.

REST.

Who is the angel that cometh?

Death!

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

"AND I tell thee, man of half an idea," said Madame Sanson, sharply, "that our Ursule is not what she was. Famished! as if an hour's journey would famish them! When I went to the station, and saw her white face looking out of the carriage, I could have cried. Madame is not so bad to see, considering what she has gone through; but Ursule!"

Madame need not have been so much alarmed, for it was rather suppressed terror at finding herself again in a railway train than any more serious ailment which affected the girl. It required all the self-command she could muster to keep herself from screaming many times on the journey, and, by the time they reached the station, she was sitting motionless and rigid, a very different person, as Clement remarked to himself, than when she was among her

bright companions of the farm. Nobody knew what she suffered, as she did not complain; and when Madame Sanson petted and pitied her with a warm motherly welcome, and she scarcely answered, he made up his mind more strongly than ever that she was selfish and spoilt, and vexed to return to her quiet home.

The meeting between the brother and sister he did not see. He and Madame Sanson helped his aunt up the old staircase, while Ursule came slowly behind, and passed on to the higher story. Louis was watching for her, and, with a cry of delight, she ran to his side, threw her arms round him, and burst into tears. She had not given way before; but now it seemed as if the terror and excitement must find a vent, and, struggle as she might, she could not regain her self-command. By-and-bye, however, Louis' caressing touch, as he smoothed her hair, began to exercise its old power, her sobs grew less frequent, her trembling ceased, and at last she looked into his face with a smile. Something she saw there made her start.

"Louis, have you been worse?"

"Do you suppose dreaming over railway accidents to be a wholesome proceeding?" said he playfully.

"Oh, I cannot bear to think of what you must have gone through. Surely you are thinner? Have you had all you wanted?"

"All, and a great deal more. I began to have fears that, if you did not soon come home, Madame would tie me up in cotton wool to preserve me. Her kindness has been wonderful; Monsieur's too. Think of his coming up here, the other day, and bringing me an offering of cider."

"Cider!"

"You need not be alarmed. I had great work to reach that drawer, but there you will find the bottle safely deposited. One had not the heart to tell him that cider was not exactly invalid's drink."

Ursule was looking attentively at her brother. There was a change in his face; it was more transparent, more spiritual-looking, in spite of the flush which the delight of her return had called up. But no shadow of the truth crossed her mind; she thought only that he had suffered from anxiety, and would need tender care. Even when, later in the day, he mentioned casually Mr. Blunt's kindness in bringing M. Pelletier to see him, she did not take alarm. It was perfectly natural to her that every one who saw Louis should be interested in him; equally natural that those who did not know his complaint should believe in a doctor's power to do good. She felt exceedingly grateful to Mr. Blunt, but not in the least conscious that Louis was more ill than usual.

It was a delightful relief to her to sit in her old place by his side, and to pour out all the experiences

of the past few days, chattering freely and unreservedly about whatever came uppermost. Always accustomed to share her thoughts with him, she told him what she felt the evening after the accident, as she lay in Dorothee's little white bed. Louis listened thankfully. It seemed as if the deliverance had opened her heart, and by that means reached her reason and her will. What she said was very simple, but it showed a juster, because a deeper, conception of her own faults than she had ever before displayed, while her perfectly truthful nature guarded her against the least exaggeration of expression. It became a grave, eager talk at last—she listening with admiring love to Louis' remarks, full of the beauty of holiness, and he speaking more freely on the subject closest to his heart than he had ever done in the days when love for him made her chief, almost her only reason for caring to listen. Yet he longed, more than ever, that some one else could be found to help his sister; he felt his own incapacity strongly. He did not know that for years he had, indeed, been rendering her the best help in the example of his life—an example which had long been secretly working, and would produce its fruit in God's good time.

When Clement came up-stairs and interrupted the conversation, Ursule slipped out of the room and ran down to Madame d'Aurigny. She found her irritably contrasting her apartment with that which

she had enjoyed at Rouen; she was certain that it had been grossly neglected during her absence, and threatened Ursule with a withdrawal of herself altogether from the house.

"That my nephew should see me here!" was the general tenor of her complaint; and it was not easy to meet it. Ursule bore, with very tolerable patience, a great deal of provocation; but she began to wonder whether this access of irritability had anything to do with the accident, and to wish that, while she had the opportunity, she had asked Sœur Monique a few more questions. Mr. Blunt's presence invariably calmed her; but when he was not in the room she gave way to excited reproaches and lamentations.

And Clement himself felt that, in a day or two at latest, he must return to his mother. He was heartily sorry to leave his aunt in her dreary solitariness, and he tried with every persuasion in his power to induce her to promise to come to England. She listened and longed, but shook her head: the strange country, the journey, the change in her habits, were too formidable obstacles to be at once surmounted. Still she thought she would go some day; she even hesitated as to fixing a date for it, and Clement at times almost believed he had succeeded in his persuasions, when some fresh motive for irresolution presented itself. He spoke to Madame Sanson about the possibility of giving his

aunt some extra comforts, and found her unconscious that anything was needed: had she not Ursule?—an argument which did not greatly impress him.

“Surely, Madame, a girl might be hired to come daily and do all that is needed for her room.”

“Monsieur is an admirable young man; but no one could do that better for Madame than Ursule. Those girls, I know them! Ah-h-h!”

Nor in speaking to his aunt did he find much more satisfaction. She was proud, and unwilling that he should suppose her not duly waited upon. She assured him that, without the necessary work for her, Madame Sanson's days would be passed in absolute idleness; and, in truth, Madame d'Aurigny would have been sorry to exchange Ursule, with all her varying moods, for the most promising *fille* in Dieppe, who was no better than a servant, and could but have supplied a servant's place. Clement could do no more than procure one or two small articles of furniture of which he saw she was chiefly in need, and press her directly she felt equal to the move to join his mother in England, engaging at any time to come and fetch her himself.

At those times when he went to sit with Louis, Ursule always left the room. Her doing so was partly owing to Madame's speech to her about Pierre Renait, and partly from the feeling that Mr. Blunt judged her severely, not unjustly; for she was too

single-minded to blame and yet excuse herself. When she acknowledged that her life had been self-pleasing and self-willed, she did not try to soften away the judgment; she set it honestly before her eyes, and determined, with God's grace, to strive against its so continuing. As yet she scarcely realized the difficulties that would beset her. An escape such as hers had been was likely to impress the most thoughtless. It had brought death before her in its most sudden and awful form; the effect must continue for some time, and gratitude seemed to make all her efforts easy. She wanted some one to warn her that this exaltation of feeling, this vivid appreciation of mercy, would pass away, and that she would need all the strength she could obtain to lead her onwards through the path of little, wearisome duties, of daily self-sacrificing efforts, of failures, of falls, of despondency. But she would as soon have thought of applying to the Maire as to the pastor of the little French congregation for help. He was a good, kindly man, unaccustomed to private ministrations or more personal influence with the members of his flock than he gained by his *prêche* in the "Temple." The very idea never crossed her mind, although Louis, less well acquainted with M. Laroche, had several times reflected on its possibility.

Ursule, as I have said, generally left the room when Mr. Blunt paid his daily visits to her brother; but, on what she knew would be his last, Louis had

beforehand asked her so imploringly to remain that she could not refuse. She withdrew, however, to the window, and sat there upon a low stool, gazing into the street, as if she had found something exceedingly interesting, and taking no part in the conversation.

She heard it, nevertheless, and she listened with a good deal of attention. Clement's manner was never so kind and gentle as with the sick boy; but she remarked that he did not so much as allude to the possibility of his becoming stronger, and a pang went through her, when this struck her, as if some unacknowledged haunting fear had suddenly taken form. He spoke of his own return, of the chance of Madame d'Aurigny's resolving to go to England; and when Louis only answered with his quiet smile, Clement said,

"Meanwhile, I want a remembrance."

"Anything that we have, Monsieur," said the boy, eagerly; "but that is so little."

He drew out the little cherry-girl, and looked at her regretfully. If it had been more advanced, here was the very thing; but, alas! his dreams of fortune had not been fulfilled; he rarely now had strength to use the brushes; the design was scarcely sketched.

"No," said Clement, kindly; "you will like to try to finish that. But what about your father's pictures? Is their price beyond my reach?"

"Oh, I wish——" began Louis. Then he stopped, confused, not daring to bestow one upon Clement,

as he would have rejoiced to do. "Which of them do you like best?" he asked.

"That sea-piece, with the storm gathering. It haunts me. It is the most suggestive picture I have ever seen."

"Ursule, can you bring it here?"

She rose at once. It was so favourite a picture of her own that she scarcely liked to part with it; but since Clement had been kind to Louis, he was welcome to anything. The price was affixed to it, and was sufficiently moderate for the young Englishman to indulge what at the same time he considered to be an act of charity. As Ursule stood there holding it in a good light, her eye sought Louis' face. The fear which had suddenly shaped itself in her heart gave her an expression of intense yearning love startling to Clement when he caught it; it was something so much deeper than he had credited her with. He began to think he had misjudged her, and to form a half-wish that he had more opportunities left of proving whether or no this was the case. But it was now too late. He bought the picture, wished Louis good-bye with an Englishman's horror of anything approaching to a display of emotion, and was a little vexed at Ursule's reserved bow; running downstairs to spend his last moments with his aunt, and to be accompanied on his departure from the house by a whole volley of affectionate farewells from Madame, and a grunt from Monsieur, which,

as his mouth was full of green peas, was the greatest effort of which he was capable, and possessed at least the merit of ambiguity.

The house seemed rather cheerless without him, it must be confessed. The events of the last few weeks had made a break in the quiet lives of its occupants, and Clement's departure left them in their old position, yet with a difference. Madame d'Aurigny bewailed herself as the one most to be pitied; but Louis also had lost a great deal in losing him, the only person who knew his secret, and could talk quietly on the subject; while to Ursule a change had come over her life, but with it a fear which would not be put aside.

As the days went on, Madame d'Aurigny claimed her attention more and more. She could scarcely endure to spend so much time with her as obliged her to leave Louis for hours in the day; yet she had found out that nothing distressed him so much as for her to refuse to sit with Madame when she desired it. Nor did he appear actually worse. She persuaded herself that it was the excessive heat that came on at this time which made him weaker; when cool weather returned again, he would regain his lost strength. She persuaded herself, and yet watched so anxiously that she grew half angry with herself, and kept her anxiety from Louis as carefully as if to hint at it would be to confirm it. Meanwhile, beyond a doubt, the accident had affected Madame

more than was at first suspected: she could not go out, complained of constant pain in her back, and was a hundred times more irritable than ever she had been before. If poor M. Sanson had heard half the complaints she uttered against his imaginary stews, even his appetite must have suffered. Madame Sanson used to descend from one of her interviews with her lodger, and exclaim, holding up her hands,

“She is getting beyond everything—that woman! One would suppose that she was mistress, and I the dirt under her feet. This must not be, and that must not be. It is as difficult to coax her into good humour as to light a stove with wet sticks. Well, after all, it is worse for her than for me; and for the rest, what will you have?—the wind that blows from the north is cold, and always will be.”

Madame's conversations with her husband were of a onesided nature, for he rarely did more than nod his large head or give an additional whiff to his pipe by way of answer, she meanwhile attaching to each manœuvre the meaning that pleased her, and replying to it as if it contained a suggestion.

“Ursule—did you ask? To say the truth, my heart aches for the poor child, and I feel quite sad about her. I can't help believing that she, too, is becoming an angel. She used to have her little furies and her naughtinesses, but now, if she is out with anything of the sort, she looks ready to cry or

to bite off her tongue! I hardly know her; I cannot think she is the same."

What Madame thought of Louis, Ursule could not understand. She said very little about him, but her motherly attentions were redoubled; and when Madame d'Aurigny refused any society but the girl's, Madame used to toil up to the top of the house and coax Louis to eat, or gossip to him about Pierre Renait's approaching marriage and the wonderful *corbeille* of his bride.

Time passed. One day Madame d'Aurigny called Ursule to return as she was leaving the room.

"By-the-bye," said she, "I have had another letter from my nephew to-day, in which he repeats a question of my sister's, to which I attached so little importance that it escaped my memory. Félicité was always a little strange; when once she had made up her mind, nothing would turn her. I remember when we were children together—well, the years go on, and it is some little time ago now—there was to be a great Pardon held, not so many kilomètres away from where we lived. My father and mother were going, as was the custom, and Félicité was wild to go also; but my mother would not hear of it. She said we children were better at home, and she should be frightened to death if she fancied us crushed in the crowd round the bonfire, and very likely getting scalded with the water out of the big cauldron; for the children always would press in to

throw their bits of stick. They would have taken us to see the saint in her beautiful bridal dress, and sent us home afterwards with the *bonne*, and that was all I cared about; but Félicité said that was nothing, and she would not go, so I had to stay at home as well.

"She looked so determined all the day, after my father and mother and my father's sister had started, with old Jean riding behind them, carrying a great bundle of flax for the saint, that I could not tell what she was thinking about, and she never liked me to ask her questions. We went to bed earlier than usual, by her wish, and I fell asleep, and slept as one slept in those days—all through the night; so figure to yourself my astonishment when, the next morning, I looked round to say something to Félicité, and found she was not there! Our *bonne*, Toinette, was more frightened than I was when she came in, and when they had hunted everywhere and could not find her. For my part, I had a strong idea where she had gone; but I dared not breathe a word of it, for I knew that Félicité would beat me when she came back, if she thought I had told anything.

"Nobody knew what to do. Toinette was afraid of sending after my father and mother, lest they should blame her for want of diligence. As for me, I went about singing, because I was sure I should hear all about the Pardon and the bonfire, and then

they scolded me for not caring about Félicité. Quite late that night, she was brought home by a young Kloer—a singing clerk—and hard work he had to carry her. She fought, and scratched, and pulled his long hair with all her might, directly she found out where he was taking her. But fancy her boldness! Little thing as she was, she had got out of the window directly she knew I was asleep, and went along the road by herself when it was nearly dark, and I should have expected at every step to meet the Buguel Nos, till she came to the plain and the bonfire, and there she played about with the other children, and at last crept under a tent, where were a number of people and children, and fell asleep. But she did not care about the next day at all; she said there was too much preaching, and they sang nothing but prayers. Still, it must have been pretty to see all the processions coming in, with their flags and their offerings, and falling down on their knees. There were so many families mixed up with one another, that Félicité got plenty to eat; but, at last, some good woman thought there was something wrong, and she persuaded the young Kloer to find out from her where she lived, and to pretend to take her to another part of the plain. Oh, how angry she was! She had wanted to see the fair the next day, and instead of that Toinette kept her in bed the whole time until my father and mother came home.”

"And that was Madame Blunt!" said Ursule, aghast.

"Yes," said Madame, smiling to herself at the remembrance, and softened by the crowd of old memories which were thronging after it. "That was Félicité exactly. You have never seen a Pardon, child? Besides, from what I hear, it is all altered now, and not worth attending."

"My mother was a Breton," answered Ursule, "and often told me of them, and the sailors trooping up from the shore."

"Ah! your mother! That was what Félicité desired to know. Where does your family come from, and your name—your name of Ursule?"

"It was my grandmother's," said the girl, with a little wonder—"Ursule Laget she was called. She lived at Nantes."

"Ursule Laget, of Nantes! And your mother was——"

"Marie."

"Child, are you sure?"

"But yes, Madame! It would be hard if one did not know so much." She looked with some astonishment at Madame, who was strangely excited, but said nothing, beyond repeating to herself over and over again in a whisper, "The child of the Lagets, at Nantes!" Presently she said, "You may go now, child; I must write," and then did what she had never done before in all her life—drew the

girl down and kissed her forehead. Ursule ran upstairs, full of wonder, to repeat the strange event to Louis, and to relate in full the history of this naughty Félicité, who was mother to no less a personage than Mr. Blunt.

It was one of those days when Louis was unusually well, sat up for a longer time, planned designs for his painting, and liked Ursule to chatter of all that passed through her head. But on the following morning he was worse than she had ever seen him—breathless, speechless, and unable to move from his bed. She called Madame in an agony of terror, and when she saw her only shake her head and look distressed, with a gesture of dumb despair, she ran down the stairs and out into the street to fetch M. Pelletier. He came, saw Louis, prescribed for him, and tried to leave the house without speaking to Ursule. He need not have been afraid; she dared not ask him any questions, or face her fears. Only she would not leave her brother. When Madame Sanson climbed the stairs to deliver Madame d'Aurigny's imperative message for her to descend, Ursule shook her head, and Madame went slowly down again, unable to press the request.

"The heat is trying you, dear," said Ursule, for the twentieth time: "you will be better when the evening comes."

"She got up quickly, and crossed the room. Louis' eyes were fastened upon her with so pe-

culiar an expression that she could not meet them.

"My darling," his voice was very low and calm, "would it not be better to face it?"

"Face it—what?" She turned sharply round with a ring of anguish in her voice.

"The knowledge you are trying to shut out."

"I do not understand," said Ursule, trembling.

"Do you not? Do you not really know that we shall not be together much longer?"

She cried out passionately, "No, no!" then meeting his eyes, flung herself down by the side of his couch, and buried her face in her hands. "M. Pelletier's medicine will do you good," she murmured.

"No medicine will do me good, dear. M. Pelletier knows that as well as I do. I have tried to spare you by not telling you before, but it might have been better to have concealed nothing."

His old trick of smoothing her hair was quieting her even now; but his exceeding weakness made speech difficult. "Why should we not talk it over like any other change?" he said. "There is nothing really terrible."

"For you——" she said, in a choked voice.

"Nor for you. Darling, it is but for a little while."

She shook her head. That little while seemed

to her to stretch through such a long vista of years!

Nevertheless, Louis believed that, when the first force of the shock was past, there was comfort in the perfect confidence of old days, which she had shrunk from inviting while she was haunted by an unacknowledged fear. He tried to prevent her from shutting out any longer the thought of his death, and to accustom her to speak of it calmly. Whatever moments of dread came over his own spirit—and who can descend into the shadows of that awful valley, and not be oppressed with some fearfulness at its unknown depths?—he hid from Ursule, speaking to her only of those brighter times of comfort when hope seemed almost to have attained its fruition.

Meanwhile Madame d'Aurigny, really suffering herself, was feeling exceedingly injured at Ursule's desertion. All that Madame Sanson could say was in vain; and one day when the girl ran down for a moment at the express desire of her old friend, she overwhelmed her with a torrent of bitter reproaches.

"Louis is very ill," said Ursule, with tears in her eyes, unheeding the reproaches.

"That is an absurdity."

"Absurdity, Madame!"

"You and he make so much of his illness."

"How dare you say so!" cried the girl, in-

dignantly, "how dare you say so! He who gives up everything—he who thinks of you when you never think of him—he make much of his suffering!"

If words and looks could wither up, Madame must have shrunk to nothing. Ursule would have said more, but by a great effort restrained herself, and hurried out of the room. Madame felt at last that she had gone too far. Ursule had been so much more gentle of late that she had taken advantage of the change, and tyrannised over her as she would not have done in past days. But this insinuation against Louis had been too much. Madame d'Aurigny began to wonder whether he were indeed seriously ill; she scarcely ever so much as asked for him; she was almost angry when Ursule alluded to his suffering, feeling it a grievance that any one besides herself in the house should meet with sympathy. Now she was a little ashamed of herself, and a good deal alarmed lest she should have altogether offended Ursule. However, in the evening the girl came down, very subdued and sad, but no longer angry. It was, of course, Louis who had persuaded her to do so, all his old dread of anything approaching to strife quickened and increased by his present condition; and it was to satisfy him that his sister agreed to deprive herself of those moments which were doubly precious now.

For each day the change was but to more utter

weakness. Power after power seemed to ebb away, while the inward light brightened. It grieved him so evidently to see Ursule shrink from speaking of what must come, that for his sake she nerved herself to talk calmly on the subject; and it was almost a surprise to her at first that, thinking of and caring for her as he did, there should be so little anxiety about her future in what he said, until she realised that the calm peacefulness—more than submission—of his spirit did not permit him so much as to doubt that all was and would be well. That trustfulness, like a little child's, was the best lesson that her less chastened heart could have received.

Louis had a longing to see his father again, but no one knew where to send to find him. It was many weeks since he had been at home; and his last letter, written from Bruges, spoke of his going on through the old Belgian towns to seek subjects for his pencil. Madame, who had regal notions on the subject of the Post Office, and believed that to post a letter was to make sure that it would be received, somehow or other, wrote one to Bruges, although it was tolerably certain that he had long ago left the town. No answer came—indeed, Ursule had not dared to expect one; but she felt their desolate position more bitterly than ever.

Yet it was not until Louis himself suggested it that she asked the French pastor to see him, nor until his visit was over, and Louis lay with a look

of gladness on his face, that she realised the joy to him of the promise of the morrow. The morrow came, and with it intense weakness; but he would not hear of putting off, and, indeed, after her first word, she dared not press it. And while for herself she never forgot the comfort of that morning, to him it seemed to have brought not only strength of soul, but a partial return of bodily powers. He spoke less feebly, and smiled like his old self when one of Monsieur Sanson's characteristic messages was given him.

"Good Monsieur and Madame! They will always be kind to you, Ursule."

"Always, dear."

"I should like to see him again. Ask him to come up to-morrow."

But Monsieur Sanson was never asked. That night brought a change, and stupor and wandering came on. They could not be sure whether at times some slight consciousness did not return, but, if so, it was confused and clouded. The sinking was gradual and painless, like that which often accompanies extreme old age. Ursule, tearless, stood by, feeling and enduring the utter helplessness which comes over the bystanders at sight of that dread, irresistible approach, and too much absorbed in him to have thought for her own part in the separation. Nay, she had strength at intervals to repeat, with an unfaltering voice, the words she had heard the pastor use the day before, and had marked in her Bible.

Madame sobbed loudly; Ursule only watched Louis—watched till there stole over his face that awful shadow which comes but once—watched till over the shadow there fell also a stillness, and, without a sign or word, she knew that the life in which her own seemed to be bound up had passed away beyond her reach.

CHAPTER X.

"ADIEU DONC, BELLE FRANCE."

But think nae ye my heart was sair,
When I laid the mould on his yellow hair?
Think nae ye my heart was wae,
When I turn'd about, away to gae?

Lament of the Border Widow.

THE following day was too full of sharp anguish to be called unreal, and yet Ursule often felt as if she was living in a dream. Paroxysms of violent sorrow were succeeded by hours in which the sorrow was only not violent, because it was stupefied. That which soothed her most effectually was the sight of his face, on which the look of everlasting peace was stamped; and while this was left to her she did not feel utterly lonely. It was on the afternoon of the funeral that Madame feared most for her. She had attended it with a quietness that was unnatural, had seen the coffin descend, heard the pastor's voice proclaim the end of the earthly life, and had walked home, tearless still, and rigid; but when she stood in the midst of their little room, and saw his empty

couch, the self-control gave way, and she burst into a passion of tears, more heart-rending than any she had yet gone through. It lasted long enough really to frighten Madame, who, looking round for consolation, caught up Louis' little brown Bible and pushed it into her hands. It seemed to Ursule like a treasure sent from him; she pressed it to her heart, and kissed it vehemently, and afterwards she consented to let Madame undress and lay her, exhausted as she was, upon her bed. The sun streamed in at the open window, and with it came a remembrance of almost the last verse she had read to him, where among the glories of the Heavenly Home it was told how the City had no need of the sun; "for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Then, as she opened the Bible, her eye fell, verse after verse, upon his favourite words; and they, too, crept into her heart and comforted it. Directly she could, in any degree, let her mind stretch itself to take in the faintest realization of what was now his joy, the healing process was begun.

But she was so very young that both life and sorrow seemed endless.

Perhaps the companionship of Madame d'Aurigny, when she nerved herself to go down, was better for her than Madame Sanson's motherly pity and petting. Madame was a little touched at first at sight of her white sad face; but no impression that was not con-

nected with herself could last long, and she soon fell into her old sharp ways. Ursule for some time was too apathetic to heed them—like a person stunned by a severe shock, by whom all lesser touches are unfelt; more than once she found herself wondering over the idea that such petty annoyances could have ever affected her.

Yet, with it all, the blow was not so crushing as it would have been a month or two earlier. She had tasted something of the Infinite Love, had learned a lesson of trust, had seen the blessing of the peace of God. Often she thanked Him that Louis had insisted upon her facing the prospect of separation, and that thus they had been able to talk openly of what lay at their hearts. Because at the end there had been no time for it—no last messages, no tender words; and there might have been a dreadful blank in her remembrances, instead of the treasured sentences now always to be kept there. They came back one by one, and it was the recalling something he had said which first startled her with the thought that her grief was selfish in its absorption, and that she had no right to tell herself that she was left alone and forlorn in the struggle of life.

That thought led on to the conviction that the little wearisome duties from which she shrank as yet were the very work which was given her to do, and she made up her mind to set them aside no longer. Their small stock of money would have been ex-

hausted, had not one of her father's pictures been sold to a dealer just at the time when Louis was at his worst; but Ursule did not know how Madame Sanson had worked for it, and gone about among all her friends until she achieved her object. She did know enough, however, to make her feel that nothing she could do could sufficiently repay the care and kindness Madame had lavished on the sick boy, and she hoped to show her gratitude in the little ways which alone were possible to her. There was no such debt owing to Madame d'Aurigny; but here she was bound by Louis' wishes, and even if he had not besought her to be kind and gentle, there was the humbling remembrance of how often she had grieved him with her loss of temper and impatience towards Madame to keep her on her guard against such failures now.

But the task was far harder than it might have been in past days. Madame's complaints of her back grew worse, and her helplessness and irritation increased also. No patience could win gratitude; no sympathy satisfied. The only person, absent or present, whom she absolved from blame was her nephew. The only thing in her life which seemed to give her pleasure was a letter from him. One morning Ursule found her, having received one, reading it for the second time.

"So you are come at last!" It was her invariable greeting.

"Have you wanted anything, Madame?"

"Your usual foolish question! Yes, I have wanted a great many things; but I have learned never to expect so much as common attention. Times are changed, indeed, since I was young."

"What can I do?" said Ursule, patiently.

"Nothing. That is just of what I complain. I lie awake in the night, and think whether anything in this house can give me pleasure—distraction from all I have to endure—and I answer myself, No. You can do nothing. It is very hard that I cannot be as other people are—that I should be alone, without relations or friends such as I ought to have. And, as if that was not bad enough, now when, for the sake of the advantages I expected you to derive, I forced myself to undertake that unfortunate journey, I am rewarded by the frightful accident which is carrying me to my grave. Oh, it is, in spite of what you say! You would believe it if you had any feeling; but no one understands me, except my nephew."

Ursule did not know what to answer. She asked whether Mr. Blunt was coming back again.

"Do you suppose that persons in his position can employ their time as they will? My nephew has sufficient good feeling to do all that I could desire; but there are exigencies which cannot be forgotten. Also, there is his mother. No," continued

Madame, dreamily, "he cannot come, but Félicité greatly desires that I should join her and him."

"In England, Madame?"

"Where else? If it were not for the voyage, the journey;—but no, it is impossible. I could not undertake it; although Félicité is so determined when once she has set her heart upon a thing, that there is no contradicting her. You were to go, too, child."

"I?"

"Yes; she desires it."

Ursule smiled a little scornfully at the idea of this unknown strong-willed Madame Blunt influencing her movements; but the smile died away in wonder that she should have been mentioned or wished for. She could not resist asking,

"And why, Madame?"

"That I am not to tell you. If I go, you go; that is all I know."

Such a disposal of herself was irritating, and the girl had much ado to keep back a sarcastic answer, instead of the words,

"The house will be very strange without you, Madame, if you should decide upon the journey."

"I have already told you that you will be with me," Madame said, angrily.

"And my father? Is he to find both of us gone?" said Ursule, in a low voice.

"He has never done himself any good, and he

will never do you any good," answered Madame, with decision. "I hate selfishness myself, and I know that all men are selfish, except perhaps Clement; but, of selfish men, your father exceeds all. You will not think of him, I hope?"

"Well," said Ursule, "after all, my going is not the question. You are not going yourself, Madame."

And the thought scarcely crossed her mind again, except as a cause of wonder that Clement Blunt's mother should desire to see her.

Madame d'Aurigny, however, continually harped upon the one string. It was curious to see how, even in the distance, Félicité's more powerful will influenced her less decided sister. Evidently, in the old days her wishes had been imperative; and now a letter dictated by her, and written by Clement—who could not venture to soften his mother's words, since she insisted always upon reading the letter before it was sent—was sufficient to set Madame in a fidget of anxiety as to the possibility of obeying what sounded very like a command. Her own weakness, instead of diminishing, increased; she had not even been out since her return to the old house, and no one could have been more unfit for the journey. Madame Sanson cried out in horror at the very thought of her undertaking it. Yet "Félicité desires it" seemed to have an influence which, in spite of the many years it had slumbered, was al-

most more powerful than all the reasons common prudence could advance.

"Ursule," said Madame Sanson, one evening, when the two women, old and young, were sitting together in the little glazed room, Madame with her feet upon a *chauffe-pied*, for the autumnal evenings were becoming a little chilly, "who do you think has been to see me to-day?"

"How can I guess?"

"Well, not so very long ago, you might have guessed quickly enough. But now I admit he is a stranger."

Ursule did not answer; but the tears sprang into her eyes. Pierre Renait was inseparably bound up with the days which appeared to be parted from her by a great gulf. Madame looked curiously at her.

"All the town talks about the magnificence of his bride," said she.

"Poor Pierre!" Ursule answered, simply, "I hope he is very happy; he was always good to Louis—always."

"Whether he is very happy or not, I neither know nor care," said Madame, who, with womanly inconsistency, was disposed to find fault with Pierre for the very line of conduct which she herself had advocated; "but, at the bottom of all his little foolishnesses, he has not a bad heart. He has been here more than once to ask after you; and this time he begged me to tell him whether you needed any-

thing. *Tiens*, Ursule, I believe he would yet give you anything he possessed."

"I believe he would," said the girl, with a touch of dignity which made Madame feel a little ashamed of her words, "for Louis' sake. But," she continued, kneeling down at her old friend's side, with a pretty caressing gesture, "did you tell him that I had better friends than he could be? I want no more, Madame."

"And you will not desert us, and go to that cold, foggy England?"

"I? No, indeed."

"Madame will not rest until she gets there, and then—I foretell the rest—any baby might see it," said Madame Sanson, throwing out her hands. "She will be starved to death, with all their proprieties and stiffnesses. Not so much as the sun will be left to warm her poor old heart."

"But Mr. Blunt would take care of her, do you not think so?" said Ursule, doubtfully.

"Perhaps, yes; perhaps, no. He is half French, to be sure; but then he could not help himself: he must be different there. And as to his mother—see her letters! Ursule, why does she want you so much?"

"Is it not strange? I cannot tell."

"You must not go."

"Listen, Madame. Since I have not had *him*, I think more and more of things which he used to

say to me. Many of them, which seemed to be forgotten, have come back lately. And it always grieved him about our father. No. Listen to me patiently: I want you to help me. You know that my father used to be a little bit fond of me; sometimes what I said he attended to, when he cared for no one else: but I was only the more angry with him for it, I could not bear that Louis should be set aside, and I thought of. You know how ill I have always behaved to him. You know that it is no wonder that he should stay away so long. But I have been punished; I was punished when I saw Louis pining to see him once more. If I had been different, he might have clung more to his home. And," with a resolute compression of her mouth, "now that the past can never be undone, one must think of the future. When my father comes, I am determined that he shall not wish to go away again."

It was a disjointed speech, but none the less earnest. Madame, who had sat humping her back, and trying to look unimpressible, came round before it was finished.

"Well," said she, shrugging her shoulders, and giving a quaint little grimace of disapproval, "if you are bent upon making a victim of yourself, I cannot prevent it. I dare say you are right. But this I say, that you had better keep me out of Jean

Lafon's way; for, as for not telling him something of what he deserves, I can't do it."

It was plain that Ursule would have little help here. She sat silent for a moment or two; then she said,

"So, you see, I shall not go to England."

"*A la bonne heure,*" cried Madame, with one of her quick changes of mood; "that's the best thing your father has brought about for a long time. Yes, yes, child, stay at home; reform him, and take care of us in our old age."

Ursule was touched to see tears in Madame's eyes. They brought her the first real conviction that, after all, there was love about her, though not such a love as she had lost, and the young heart rebounded to the touch. She grew more animated than Madame had seen her yet, and made up her mind that here, in devotion to her father and her kind old friend, lay the life-work about which she had thought much lately.

But it is not often that our life-work discloses itself beyond the hour or the day.

A month passed, and September came. Jean Lafon had been absent ever since June; and although once or twice he had written, he had given on opportunity for an answer. Madame d'Aurigny grew more helpless and more complaining, and still talked of her journey to England. But one morn-

ing Madame Sanson came up as hastily as she could to Ursule.

"Come—come, quickly, child. There is some fresh news, which has made her like a mad woman!"

In effect, Madame was more excited than Ursule ever remembered having seen her, wringing her hands, gesticulating, sobbing, and entreating them all to hasten, without saying for what. It was many minutes before she let fall anything to enlighten them, although a letter, with an English post-mark, in her lap showed from what quarter the disturbance came.

"See, dear Madame," Ursule said, soothingly, "what would you have us do?"

"The boat—the steamer."

"There, it's the English boat she talks of," said Madame Sanson, putting the girl aside. "Madame expects some one; is not that it?"

"Shall I never be understood? Has no one common perception? Can you not so much as find out at what hour we must start?"

The girl and Madame Sanson looked at each other. Madame d'Aurigny broke out again more vehemently,

"I tell you there is no time to lose, with Félicité ill—perhaps dying. Where are my things? How slow you are; you will never be ready!"

"Are you going to England, Madame?"

"Have I not said so twenty times over? and can you not see that in the letter?"

Taking this as a permission, and hoping to put an end to the entanglement of cross-interrogations, Ursule read the letter, written in Clement's bold English hand, although consisting of his mother's words—broken, but as emphatic as ever—desiring her sister and Ursule Lafon to come at once. A postscript from Clement himself gave the key:—"She has been very ill, but is slightly revived. If you can bear the journey, come. The doctor says she is suffering from great anxiety to see you and Mademoiselle Lafon; and we fear the consequences if she is disappointed. As vigorous in mind as ever, but all her bodily powers shattered. I will meet you at Newhaven, for nothing else will content her; otherwise, as you may conceive, I should not leave her." Underneath was written again, "Pray come."

"And Madame really means to go?" said Madame Sanson, comprehending at last.

"It will kill me; but what can I do? If Félicité has set her heart upon it, she will not rest in her grave unless I go," answered Madame d'Aurigny, subsiding into tears.

She was so utterly miserable, unreasonable, and overcome, that they could only look pityingly at her, and hastily think what was the best thing to be done. It was at the same time almost a relief to

remember that the hour for the departure of the English steamer was already past.

"I will collect your things, Madame," Ursule said. "It is too late for to-day; besides which, by to-morrow you will have recovered yourself. M. Blunt knows all about the boats; he will not expect you until to-morrow."

"You are coming also?" said Madame, eagerly.

"No, indeed, I cannot. I will see you on board, and M. Clement will meet you."

She expected an outbreak of anger; but Madame only burst into tears, and said no one had any thought for her.

"Félicité desires it, Félicité desires it," she said, crying feebly, in a manner which distressed and bewildered poor Ursule.

"Dear Madame, I have no right to go, and give up my father."

"Yes, your father—your father, whom you respect so greatly, and who cares so much for you! Has your father ever been to you what I have been? And you leave me to go alone among strangers."

"I cannot go to England," she repeated, in a trembling voice, feeling as if her resolution could scarcely hold out. Fortunately Madame Sanson came to her support.

"You see, Madame, it is no use to contradict

nature; leave her alone, and let us see what you most need for your journey."

In the midst of the altercation, and the tears which followed, Madame Sanson put her finger to her lips in sign of silence. Tramp, tramp, came a man's step up the stairs. Ursule, too, heard it, and turned pale. She stood motionless for a moment to collect her thoughts, then slipped out of the door, and up the stairs after the step. The young girl went up hastily; the door of her room was already open, and just as she entered the man had flung himself down on a chair, and was unstrapping a heavy knapsack from his shoulders. It was, as she knew, her father.

"One of you at last," he said, drawing down her face to his level, and kissing her airily on both cheeks. "I was beginning to wonder whether the nest was altogether deserted, and no one left to say '*Soyez le bienvenu.*'"

He was a little fresh-complexioned man, with a broad forehead, eyes that carried in them a certain sense of humour and enjoyment, but with a sudden falling-off in the narrow tapering jaw—a face that could be pleasant while he was pleased, and perhaps signified that he would not greatly scruple at the means by which his pleasure was to be obtained. He held his daughter an arm's length from him, and looked her up and down with a critical eye.

"You have lost your roundness of cheek, and

have not improved in appearance since last I saw you, child. Heavens, if girls, with all their vanity, would only consider that to lose their look of youth is like losing the bloom off a peach, and take a little more pains to preserve it! And why, since you always wear a dark dress, do you not perceive that a spot of colour is wanted somewhere?—on your bosom, in your hair, where you will, so long as there is some lightening of the sombre effect. You have not employed your advantages, Ursule, as an artist's daughter. How is Louis?"

The easy, indifferent manner gave her strength to answer him steadily.

"Father, people do not wear dresses so dark as this without cause."

His fresh complexion faded into a duller hue, and he looked searchingly round the room, as if seeking for signs of his son. But he only said, with a forced laugh.

"The poor child! I suppose that means that I have not kept you over-bountifully supplied with money?"

She did not attend; she was watching his change of countenance, and cried out passionately,

"Why did you not come? He asked for you every day——"

She stopped. Her father was standing before her, grasping her shoulder. "Dead?" he demanded, in a hoarse whisper.

No answer was needed; Jean Lafon read it in her eyes. An expression swept over his face which startled her; but with a strong effort he controlled himself. When, after a terrible silence of some minutes, she heard him speak, it was to whisper over and over to himself, "Marie's boy! Poor Marie!" When afterwards he looked round at her, he had, to all appearance, recovered himself, except that he turned away as if not liking to face her, and sat with his head supported in his hand. He asked a few short questions as to the boy's death, ending with one for which she was not prepared.

"What are you going to do?"

There was a pause, which she broke by saying at last, "I hoped that you would stay."

"Much advantage that would be!" said her father, bitterly. "No, no; you have your own friends here, and I will do what I can for you: there is no occasion for your starving. But as to staying here, bah!—these walls suffocate one!"

"So I am to be got rid of, too?"

"Aha! There was my little Ursule again. I thought you had lost all your spirit with your colouring. Got rid of? No, certainly. Stay here, where you have friends? Yes. Why, you would not tramp over the country at my heels, would you? Besides, child, there are other hindrances."

"But you will come back more often? You will not stay away so long again?"

"Well," said he, shrugging his shoulders, "I am not so sure I should be welcome. In effect, I may as well tell you at once, that I came to announce a little fact in my history which I cannot expect will be highly interesting to you, but which it may be as well you should know. Since my departure in June, you have gained a new relation, in the person of a mother-in-law. You will understand, therefore, that this fact necessitates a change in my domestic arrangements."

"Do you mean that you are already married?" asked Ursule, quietly.

"Precisely. I congratulate you upon two points of character, which, without flattery, I may, I think, conceive to have been derived from me—a power of comprehension, in which I have generally found your sex deficient, and an absence of excitability—a still more rare and precious quality."

Her hands were locked tightly together. Perhaps he felt more than his words betrayed; certainly she had hard work to keep up the composure he praised.

"Your mother-in-law is a Belgian," he continued, "an excellent woman; but I am inclined to think that as she is not exempt from ordinary little weaknesses, a grown-up daughter, however charming, would not add to the harmony of our household. If you will, matters can continue as at present. Here you are under the protection of our admirable Mon-

sieur and Madame Sanson—does his appetite continue as absorbing as ever?—and our still more amiable Madame d'Aurigny. I am convinced you will be invaluable to them as a daughter. I have brought you something with which to go on, and I do not mind promising you more regular remittances. Art is in demand, and your mother-in-law possesses substantial advantages which, I feel, are likely to prove a comfort to me in my declining years. Have you any particulars to suggest?"

"No," she said. "You mean, that you leave me to myself?"

"I have the most perfect confidence in your discretion," he said, drawing out a cigar and proceeding to light it; "and I can pay you no higher compliment."

"Madame d'Aurigny goes to England to-morrow."

"And wishes you to go with her? The very thing, my dear child. How fortunate that I should have arrived to-day, just in time to remove any lingering scruples on my account! The tour will enlarge your mind, and it is not improbable that you may fascinate a rich Englishman. Do not forget my pictures—a few orders would not come amiss; for however much one may despise their views of art, they have always the merit of paying well. My dear Ursule, I congratulate you."

She could not answer. However much his long

absences had separated him from his children, there was something indescribably bitter in this ready renunciation. The only comfort she felt—and this was uncertain—was a doubt whether he was as easy about it as he represented himself. He moved a little restlessly as he spoke, and he still, as much as possible, avoided looking at her; but his manner absolutely repelled all tenderness, although he showed no unkindness until, upon his rising and saying that he was going out, she offered to go with him: then his refusal was actually rough.

"Leave me alone. I want no one."

She wondered at the change, especially when at the door he turned round in his usual easy way to ask whether he should make inquiries about the next day's steamer.

"If you please," Ursule said, feeling as if she was in a dream, and a net was closing round her. When he was gone, she went slowly round the room, looking at this, that, and the other, as if she scarcely knew what she was doing; then she walked out of the door, leaned over the balustrade, and looked up. Her pigeons were waiting for her on the edge of the roof, cooing and pluming themselves in the warm sunshine. Never had the sky looked a deeper, more intense blue. The beauty, the peacefulness, were such as she had never realised before. To gaze into that wonderful depth, and to think of death, was to think of it without the sting; to re-

member not the grave, but the resurrection. "I am not leaving him now," she said; "he is as near in one place as in another."

She went down-stairs. Madame Sanson was waiting for her at the door.

"Well?" she whispered.

"It was my father. He came to tell us that he has married again. Hush!" she said, stopping Madame's voluble ejaculations. "And now you must let me go to England, dear Madame, since certainly she wants me more than you do."

"Oh!" Madame heaved a sigh of dismay.

Ursule went into the room, and walked up to the old lady.

"I will go to England with you, if you desire it, Madame."

"Félicité desires it," repeated Madame d'Aurigny; "and of course you may go, child, as I have told you twenty times."

"Why does she want me?" asked the girl, with a sudden access of curiosity.

"You should not ask questions," answered Madame, looking mysterious, and treating her as she used in the days when she was a little child.

There was hardly time for them. Ursule had as much on her hands as she could get through, with all Madame's things and her own to put together, and only half help from Madame Sanson, who was an unwilling assistant, and thought the whole affair

a folly. She worked with all her might to finish what required to be done, and to earn the quiet hour which she promised herself before the evening set in. Her father was not much in the house. When he met Madame Sanson, he treated her with an imperturbable politeness, which irritated her more than any other line of conduct he could have pursued; and he kept up the same impassable barrier between himself and his daughter.

Ursule got out at last, feeling as if she must have time to think, and turning instinctively to the old haunts from which she used to draw the descriptions in which her brother delighted. She wandered into the cathedral, where already the evening shadows were gathering, and only a few solitary worshippers were sprinkled about—peasant-women mostly, with their baskets by their side, having gone in there to offer a few fervent prayers before returning to their homes. Even the yellow wash and the tawdry disfigurements of the interior could not mar the solemnity of the scene. She went softly round to one of the side aisles, where were lovely little canopies, carved in stone so delicately that they looked like fretted lace-work. Her sense of the beautiful made her fonder of the venerable old church than of the bare ugliness which distinguished the little "Temple," as Madame persisted in calling it. She prayed more often, as she did on the day in question, in this church than her own.

Coming out, her next point was Louis' grave. When she reached it, she saw that another had been beforehand; for a wreath of *immortelles*, such as France produces by thousands, lay on the grave. Ursule's eyes brightened when she caught sight of it. Surely her father had done this, and he was not utterly callous. That conviction helped her more than anything else could have helped her through what—try as hard as she might to realise that the grave did not in truth hold him—would seem a leave-taking. It had been a comfort to her, when she was weary and inclined to despond, to steal away to the little quiet corner in the cemetery, and to feel as if there she was nearer him. Yet she did not wish him back again. Every remembrance of him was so pure and saintly, that it seemed unfit he should be mixed up with the sin and struggle of life. It was better that he should be taken from her than be wounded by such scenes as she had gone through that day. And it was a curious effect of her own deepening of character, that she felt as if she was only gradually, now that he was taken away, beginning to understand him. With all their intense love for each other, the two had, so to speak, lived in different elements; and she had taken a great deal for granted as natural to his temperament and to his state of health, which now she perceived to have been the result of constant watchfulness. Ursule almost triumphed in the thought of his su-

periority to herself. Then suddenly, with a burst of vehemence, she flung herself by the side of the grave, trembling, and crying out to him under her breath, giving way as she had not done since the funeral. The outbreak of tears relieved her; she got up, and, with clasped hands, turned away, and hurried out of the cemetery, not daring to look round again.

She had more to do, however, before she went back to the old house for the last time, and it was growing so late that she hurried along, past the fishermen's quarter and the harbour, to one of the houses, near the sea, where Pierre Renait and his bride were living with Monsieur and Madame Renait the elder. She went quickly up the stairs to the second flat, which was in the occupation of the young couple, and asked to speak to Monsieur Pierre. He was just coming out of the door of his room as she made the request, and, in the fading light, did not at first recognize her. When her voice revealed who his visitor was, she could hardly help smiling at the theatrical gesture in which he indulged; it seemed to her so strangely out of place and unnatural now. She stopped him from speaking with a slight movement of her hand, and said hurriedly,

"Pardon my intrusion, M. Pierre; I will not detain you for more than one little moment. Many months ago you had the goodness to execute a commission for us—to dispose of a little picture, which

had been painted by my—my brother.” Her voice faltered, but she went on: “It is a strange thing in which to ask your assistance, but I am very desirous—I would give all I have to buy it back again.”

“Mademoiselle——” stammered Pierre.

“If you will only tell me to whom it was sold, I ask no more. I am going away from Dieppe to-morrow. I have very little of his belonging to me in the world. You wonder, I dare say, that I have not other drawings; but his strength failed too rapidly for him to do more. I cannot tell you how thankful I should be to see it again.”

Pierre glanced rapidly back at the door. “Mademoiselle,” he said, advancing a step nearer, “the person who possesses that painting values it among his best treasures.”

“He cannot value it as I do,” said Ursule, simply. “Indeed, M. Pierre,” she continued, with a touch of her old decided manner, “I have set my heart upon it.”

“And you are leaving Dieppe?” he said, reproachfully.

“To-morrow. There is no time to lose. I am sure you will assist me for Louis’ sake.”

“Oh, Mademoiselle——” he wanted to assure her that there was nothing he would not do for her own sake; but a certain quiet dignity in her manner kept him from any display of foolishness. She waited for

him to finish his sentence, and, finding he hesitated, said earnestly,

"I have the money with me. Where shall I find the owner?"

"Mademoiselle"—Pierre stepped on one side, laid his hand upon his heart, and made her a sweeping bow—"your charming portrait is in my possession: you do not ask to deprive me of it?"

"You bought it yourself!" Ursule said, a pang crossing her mind at the remembrance of their happy castles in the air. "Oh, M. Pierre, that was not right of you."

He hastened to assure her that it was worth all he had paid for it; that several judges had seen and admired it, and would gladly have given orders for its fellow; and concluded by again entreating her not to ask him to restore so highly valued a treasure.

"I know that you prize it for his sake," she said, gravely, "but not as I do. You do not know how little is left to me: I cannot give up this."

He was not proof against her earnestness, and without another attempt at flowery language fetched and placed it in her hands. Tears sprang into her eyes as she looked at it, and Pierre, whose heart was easily touched, made an awkward though well-intentioned attempt at consolation. He tried to prevent her from giving back the money; but Ursule's

will invariably carried the day, and it was the same now. She put out her hand, and said gratefully,

"Thank you, with all my heart. Thank you, too, for all your kindness to him."

"Is this adieu, Mademoiselle Ursule?"

"Yes. I go to-morrow to England, with Madame d'Aurigny. *Au revoir*, M. Pierre."

He would have liked a more romantic parting; but Ursule preserved the most common-place demeanour, so that he was obliged to content himself with a profound demonstration of respect in conducting her down the stairs, and out of the large double entrance-doors. Ursule smiled sadly, as she turned towards home, at the thought of Pierre's little weaknesses, which would have made her wholly contemptuous had not his connection with Louis rendered her patient towards him.

"Poor Pierre!" she said to herself; "evidently he spends more time than ever with the *coiffeur*. And yet he has such a good heart!"

She was too utterly wearied out that evening to feel the strange change that was taking place in her life, and, when the next morning came, steeled herself for all that lay before her, with the determination not to break down. Her father was not altogether like himself, yet he made it as impossible as ever for her to show or extract the least display of affection.

"Such is life!" he said, waving his hands: "the

young birds quit the nest, and find new ones for themselves. Not a word, *mon amie*; your conduct in this matter has been all that there is of admirable. You will be a daughter to that poor old lady; and I shall console myself with thinking that your virtues are appreciated."

Madame d'Aurigny was miserably unfit for the journey—crying and nervously irritable, but evidently in greater dread of neglecting Félicité's wish than of any suffering she might endure in obeying it. She was carried down-stairs and into the carriage that was to convey her to the steamer, Madame Sanson—who, between her attempts at cheerfulness, gave way to piteous sobs—accompanying the pair of travellers. M. Sanson afforded the strongest proof of interest of which he had ever been proved capable. He left an omelette to its fate at the most critical period of its existence, and went out of the dark archway to wave his cap and wish "*Bon voyage!*" Jean Lafon, on his side, clapped poor M. Sanson on the back with a vigour which deprived him altogether of breath, and, kissing his hand as the carriage rolled away, exclaimed,

"A worthy trio, my friend, and one of which you have reason to be proud! I have often remarked that there is in the feminine mind a fund of heroism which is sublime. That is as it should be, is it not? Nevertheless, were I you, I should prefer Madame's affections being less copiously supplied

with tears: they are touching, but, to say the least of it, unbecoming. For myself, before my marriage with the present Madame Lafon, I exacted a promise that she would make a point of never weeping in my presence. It saves me a display of sympathy which might be forced, and her the pain of seeing me suffer. *Allons!* shall I assist you in the omelette?"

CHAPTER XI.

MADAM BLUNT'S WILL.

Thus some passing qualm to smother,
Oft will man, too, treat his brother,
Wronging one to right another.

REV. T. WHITEHEAD.

MADAME D'AURIGNY, enveloped in shawls and cloaks, partly her own and partly provided by the stewardess, was laid upon the deck; for it was thought advisable that she should not undergo the difficulty of being carried up and down the steep descent for the few hours which the passage lasted. Ursule was too much occupied with her to have time to think of her own feelings. When she turned to take a yearning look at the old town, they were already out of the harbour and well on their way. She fancied—but it might have been fancy—that she could distinguish Madame Sanson's figure waving farewells to them from the extremity of the pier, whither she had hurried from the place of embarkation; and she waved again in reply, though tears blotted out not only Madame, but the long beach,

and the white houses, and the far-stretching line of white cliffs.

The green waves, tipped with sunlit foam, were cheerful and invigorating enough to make her for a while watch them with admiration; but, before long, every sensation, save that of misery, was quenched and she gave herself up to a despairing indifference to the worst that could happen to herself or her fellow-creatures. Fortunately Madame did not suffer any worse ailment than headache, and was able to dispense with her young companion's assistance, although feeling herself victimised by her helplessness, and disposed to blame her for giving way to it. But praise and blame were equally indifferent to Ursule, and she scarcely lifted her head until a compassionate fellow-voyager assured her that her troubles were nearly over, and that they would soon be at Newhaven. Never had the minutes seemed so long as between that promise and the time when she staggered to her feet, and looked despairingly round with the hope of seeing a friendly face among the crowd. None was there; and Madame's tremulous anxiety was beginning to grow into terrified bewilderment, when a man, who had been watching the passengers land, came on board, and addressed himself to her in French, with the inquiry whether she was not Madame d'Aurigny. Further words elicited the fact that Mr. Blunt was not there himself, but that the master of the hotel at Newhaven had that after-

noon received a letter from him, which he would have the honour of showing to Madame, and in consequence of which he begged leave to place himself at her service, and to mention that he had made arrangements for her being conveyed to the hotel during the hour or two which Madame would probably require for rest before continuing her journey.

In the midst of the bustle and the perplexities of hearing a strange tongue about them, the two women clung to their new friend as a protector; and Clement's letter had provided for all arrangements that were necessary in carrying Madame d'Aurigny on shore. Before leaving Dieppe, Ursule had not had the time to dwell upon the minor trials which lay before her, added to which, she had expected to find Mr. Blunt waiting for them upon their arrival; now she felt overwhelmed with her own helplessness, and frightened to remember that she knew nothing of English. Perhaps Mr. Blunt's letter would explain; perhaps he was coming by a later train. She watched eagerly while Madame, in their little room at the hotel, opened the letter which her nephew had inclosed for her in that to the master. A paper fluttered out of it, which Ursule picked up and held in unconsciousness of its character. Madame gave a cry of dismay as she read,

"Félicité is worse! Clement does not like to leave her."

"Are we not to go, then, Madame?"

"Oh, I do not know; all the words dance before my eyes. She must be very ill, and yet she was always so strong—much stronger than I. *Tiens*, take the letter yourself; read quickly. What does he say? What is that name? Sal—Salis——"

"Salisbury," said Ursule, spelling out the word with a pronunciation very unlike its own. "Monsieur says that, after you have rested here a little while, we are to go to this town Salisbury, since it is too far for you to travel to Elmwood to-day. He says we must sleep there, and that he will send another letter there; but we must hurry on as fast as possible, for that his mother asks continually for us both. Dear Madame, why can she wish so much for me?"

"Oh, do not always think of yourself, Ursule," said Madame, pettishly; "I am the person to be considered, I think. What are we to do?—what will become of us? I cannot imagine how it is that you should know nothing of English!"

"Mr. Blunt says that he incloses you an order for money, which the landlord here will change. This is it, no doubt," said Ursule, showing the cheque she held in her hand.

"Yes; Félicité undertook to pay for our journey. Oh, I cannot think what to do next!" Madame repeated, wringing her hands.

"Suppose we ask the—the Monsieur who brought

us here when the train will start for Salisbury?" said Ursule, timidly pulling the bell.

The Monsieur was very willing to assist his countrywomen, and had indeed received orders to that effect. He made everything as clear to them as he could, obliged Ursule to repeat over and over again, until she had a chance of being understood, the obnoxious name of Salisbury, and left them with the promise to return and take them to the train in which they were to start.

Madame d'Aurigny, wearied with the voyage and with her lamentations, fell asleep upon the hard sofa on which she was stretched. Ursule, tired as she was, felt far too much excited to sleep, and sat looking wistfully at the black horsehair furniture, which appeared to base its claims to respect upon its ugliness; the round table, with its red figured cloth and its burden of inkstand, woolly mats, and two or three gorgeously bound volumes of the "Penny Magazine"; the never-failing bronze gas chandelier, all pulleys and chains; the upright chiffonier, with cruet-stand and shells; on the walls, coronation prints and two or three domestic photographs. She looked at them; but all the time she was thinking not so much of those she had left, as of those to whom she was going—of this inflexible Madame Blunt, who had resolved to bring them to England, and had succeeded, whose desire to see her was as persistent as it was unaccountable—of

her son, Monsieur Clement, who had been good to Louis, but evidently, for some cause, disapproved of her. "He has reason," Ursule said to herself, humbly and sadly. "I dare say the young ladies he knows are good and useful, while I am of no use to any one. But why does Madame, his mother, want to see me?"

Puzzle over it as she might, there was no answer to be found to this question.

Madame d'Aurigny did not awake until the Frenchman came in to say that the men were ready to carry her into the railway carriage. He did all that he could to lighten their difficulties, which looked formidable enough to the two inexperienced travellers, especially when added to that dreadful shrinking from the train, which, although Madame had suffered most severely by the accident, seemed to affect Ursule more. He gave them a list of the chief stations through which they would pass, and enlisted the sympathy of the guard on their behalf; so that he assured them they would not be left to their own unaided resources to reach Salisbury, where they would find that Mr. Blunt had written to a hotel-keeper to give them the same sort of reception as he had provided for them at Newhaven. In fact, Clement, in the midst of all his trouble on his mother's account, was sorely perplexed as to the best means of providing, in his hurry, for his helpless old aunt. If his mother was better, he intended,

as he told her in a postscript, to meet her at Salisbury; and this hope buoyed up both Madame d'Aurigny and Ursule until, very late in the evening, they reached the termination of their journey, and were again condemned to disappointment.

Ursule was certainly changed. No one could have been more trying during the day than Madame d'Aurigny. She laid the blame of all that did or could happen against her wishes upon her companion, and prophesied more evil than one journey could well contain. Ursule forced back her own fears to answer with a patience that rarely failed, and to try and divert her mind with remarks upon the country through which they passed—the bright, almost unknown green of the English fields, the sea, the churches, and the little hamlets nestling in picturesque hollows. Madame expatiated freely upon the girl's want of feeling in having the heart to notice such frivolities; but, nevertheless, her naïve remarks assisted to while away the time, until, towards their journey's end, Ursule was shocked to perceive how exhausted Madame d'Aurigny was growing, and how much suffering the constant motion began to cause to her back. Matters did not go on as smoothly at Salisbury as at Newhaven, since the hotel could not produce a Frenchman; and Ursule felt as if they were only parcels, treated without any will of their own, according to the directions written by Mr. Blunt. Luckily, these

were explicit, and, between them and the use of signs, they managed to obtain all that they needed; but Ursule, when she had assisted Madame into bed, and watched vainly for some sign of sleep, felt an uncomfortable foreboding that all Mrs. Blunt's commands would not enable her sister to start again on the following morning.

The commands never were issued. With the morning came a telegram from Clement, containing only the words, "If Madame d'Aurigny has arrived, do not let her leave the hotel until she hears from me." In the middle of the day, a letter explained the message. Mrs. Blunt had died the previous day; and Clement, breaking the news as gently as possible to her sister, suggested her either coming on at once, or waiting at Salisbury until after the funeral, when he would fetch her himself.

The news came upon Madame d'Aurigny with as great a shock as if she had been wholly unprepared. That Félicité, whom she had last seen strong, active, and determined, Félicité, with her keen bright eye and springy step, should be dead was utterly inconceivable. She had never so much as thought of her being old, in spite of Clement's descriptions. Descriptions and words, indeed, seldom give us an adequate idea of the change from youth to age, from strength to infirmity, in those we have known intimately. We hear of it; but, when we see it, we receive the sort of shock that a sudden

transition from summer to mid-winter would cause. Félicité had been a link with the youth of past years; she thought of her as her child-companion, not as the old woman of upwards of three-score years and ten. She had never dwelt much upon her illness; she had set her heart upon the meeting, and now—Félicité was gone. It was not so much the loss as the disappointment that she felt; but Ursule did not analyse her feelings, and was greatly touched by a grief which she had not expected to see. Madame's first outcry was to go on, that she might see her sister again; and neither of them understood how much longer time would elapse between the death and burial than was the case in their own country. However, it was very soon evident that Madame was not well enough to attempt to continue the journey: the news had taken away the spring of action which sustained her, and she gave way completely. Ursule was at her wits' end; she would have gladly called in a doctor, but, added to Madame's dislike to the idea, there was the difficulty of making themselves understood—a difficulty which had proved serious enough with regard to the telegram. She was, fortunately, provided with the remedies Madame was in the habit of taking; but this detention, with its solitary dreariness, was very different from their stay at the hospitable farm-house.

The days were very long. Madame d'Aurigny

could not bear to be left alone, and Ursule sat by her bed, rubbed her back, read to her, and chatted as brightly as she could. On Sunday she gained leave to go to church, and, although she hesitated from venturing into the midst of a strange congregation, and dreaded a service in a strange language, yet she longed for the refreshment which even the change from the sick-room would give. When she found herself in the cathedral, her enjoyment was intense. She had been inclined to believe that beautiful buildings and beautiful music belonged only to the Roman Catholic religion, and Salisbury Cathedral was her first assurance of the contrary. The singing was not above the average, but to Ursule it seemed angelic; the organ, in its solitary state, far grander than the orchestral crash in the French churches. She lingered after the service was over, unwilling to tear herself away; and more than one looked with curiosity at the young girl, in her mourning dress, who listened with such rapt attention to the voluntary. But all that she related to poor Madame on her return only had the effect of increasing her misery. She had come—Heaven forgive her!—to a land of heretics, where her soul would be starved, where she could expect no comfort. She had come without advice, simply because Félicité desired it, and, now Félicité was dead, she was dying herself. Ursule would be left to shift for herself in a foreign country, and by that time she

would realise a little of all that she—Madame d'Aurigny—had endured for her. It was a country of barbarians, where she could scarcely procure so much as a *sucrier*—where everything was so terribly dear that the money melted away if you looked at it—where the servants were insolent, the food coarse. What would she not give to find herself back with those good Sansons! Ursule grew a little pale as Madame prognosticated her own rapid death and burial. It was true that, on looking back, she seemed to have run a great risk in making this change of country. Still, surely she had been right. How much worse would Madame's condition have been if she had travelled alone to England! Certainly this sudden, unprepared-for event in the young girl's life was brightened by no happy dreams or golden visions: no soft misty haze hung over her fancies of the future; yet the simple steadfastness with which she faced the dreary monotony she saw before her promised better for her happiness than if she had been buoyed up by a hundred glowing anticipations. She had come to devote herself to Madame, and she had not even a wish to shrink from the task.

She bought an English dictionary and a little book of phrases, and her position being the one exactly the most favourable to learning a language, she gradually made a little way towards being understood. Having a fire in the room, she was

also able to prepare things for Madame d'Aurigny, to the intense scandal of the waiter. These were her amusements, and she contrived to extract out of them somewhat with which to entertain Madame. A letter came from Clement, promising that he would be with them the day after the funeral—in two days' time—and earnestly hoping that his aunt would be sufficiently recovered to return with him to Elmwood. She, for her part, insisted on the impossibility; but Ursule perceived, from one or two words which she let drop, that her real intention was to go; and her state of health appeared to hinge so completely upon her mind and will, that it was possible she might, indeed, brace herself to the effort. At all events, it was a comfort that she could be roused to think of action, for her spirits were growing worse and worse under the confinement and solitude of her present life.

On the morning of the day when her nephew was expected, Madame for the first time proposed to leave her bed; and she also insisted upon Ursule's making everything ready to start, while, at the same time, protesting that her own departure was an impossibility. She sent Ursule into the town to procure some medicine; and when she returned, Clement had arrived, and Madame d'Aurigny was eager to leave at once. He would not agree to this, but persuaded her to wait for the next day; and, in fact, the excitement of seeing him, and hearing

all that he had to relate, was quite as much as her feeble strength would bear. Ursule herself had a day of liberty—Madame wanted no one but her nephew; and the girl rambled away for hours, with a sense of freedom which was a delight to one so little accustomed to restraint as she had been. She was never weary of looking at the Cathedral, and often she caught herself in the old habit—the hardest of all to break off after daily companionship—of storing up something to relate to Louis. She went through the streets and stared into the shops with a girl's delight. Then she crossed the meadows, and wandered along by the side of a delicious trout stream, rapid and clear as glass, and under trees just tinged with autumnal tints, and past cottages set in gardens blazing with scarlet geraniums and roses; and looked back upon the delicate grey spire rising out of the level, and down into the waving beds of weed in the river; and at last walked reluctantly home, with a face so bright and cheerful, that Clement involuntarily pronounced the same verdict of want of feeling. He was himself worn and wearied; his mother's illness had ended in a comparatively sudden manner, and without any return of consciousness during the last two days. Until then she had been continually restless and agitated about seeing her sister and Ursule; but after the third paralytic stroke there was unbroken insensibility. Ursule pitied him from her heart,

when she saw his face, and understood how much the idea weighed upon him that Madame d'Aurigny had given up her country and her home, and was in a manner dependent upon him. She tried all the more to speak hopefully of her state, and to raise his spirits; and she succeeded in some measure, although only at the cost of strengthening his preconceived opinion. When he left the room, she was astonished at his saying that he would be glad to speak to her in the sitting-room he had engaged, whenever in the course of the evening she was able to leave his aunt; but Madame d'Aurigny herself treated it so lightly, and was so persuaded that he only wished to arrange matters for her comfort on the next day, that she felt ashamed of her own curiosity.

She could not go down until rather late in the evening, when Madame was asleep. Clement opened the door in answer to her knock, and drew a chair for her near the fire. He was so long, however, in opening the conversation that she said, timidly,

"Did you wish to speak to me?"

"I beg your pardon," he said, starting, "I have no right to detain you; but, to tell the honest truth, I was thinking how to begin. Mademoiselle, have you never wondered why my poor mother wished so greatly to see you?"

"Yes, very often," said Ursule, eagerly. "I have

asked Madame frequently, but she always said that I must wait."

"She left the explanation to my mother, and, now that it is too late for you to receive it from her lips, it is only due to you to explain it."

"I can wait still," said she, in a low voice, noticing his compressed lips.

"Thank you. It is necessary that you should understand the matter without further delay. We must go back in your history, Mademoiselle Lafon. Your mother, I believe, died while you were very young?"

"Seven years old, Monsieur," replied Ursule, wondering what was coming.

"And your grandfather and grandmother—do you remember them?"

"I can just remember something of my grandfather: but I was very little when he died; and then we soon left Nantes and came to Dieppe."

"And your grandmother's name was——"

"Laget—Ursule Laget. I am called after her."

"Did your mother ever tell you stories about what happened to her when she was young, or that her father and mother had told her? Children have those sort of things told them, you know," continued Mr. Blunt, seeing that Ursule hardly knew what to make of his cross-questioning.

"She never had time for stories," said Ursule. "I can't recollect any."

"Then I will tell you one. Listen. A long time ago, when France was shedding blood without mercy, a little child was carried out to be shot in the horrible *fusillades* of Nantes. A man saved her—a man who had no children of his own at that date, or he could hardly have consented to be one of the murderers of those little ones. He atoned for his sin by the act; for it was at the peril of his own life that he managed to convey this little frightened child home to his wife; it was at the peril of both their lives that he and she kept her with them until they could convey her to her friends at Bordeaux. Is this story new to you?"

"Quite."

"But you have guessed something of the truth? The little child was called Félicité Devaux; the man and his wife were Jacques and Ursule Laget."

"It was your mother?"

"It was my mother, whom your grandfather saved."

"Oh, I am glad," said Ursule, clapping her hands. "It is like a romance. But I never knew it; how did you find it out?"

"Your name gave the clue. Somehow or other, my father and mother lost sight of your family after the death of your grandmother: my father intended to go to Nantes to make inquiries whom Marie Laget had married; but he died, and my mother

lost heart for everything. When first I heard your name, it sounded familiar to me; and, directly I mentioned it, my poor mother did not rest until she heard more. Do you not remember Madame d'Aurigny's questions?"

"Oh, yes; how they puzzled me! And it was this which made Madame Blunt desire to see me? I wish——"

"Yes," said Clement, divining what she would have said. "It is curious that she longed more earnestly to see you—Ursule Laget's grandchild—than her own sister."

Ursule's eyes sparkled. "I am sure I should have loved her," she said.

"This is not all that I have to notify to you, Mademoiselle," said Clement, gravely. "I should have let my aunt have the pleasure of repeating that little history, had there not been a sequel which was only known to me yesterday. I must ask you now to listen to details of a different nature. I can only promise to make them as short as I can."

"Go on, if you please, Monsieur."

"You are aware, perhaps, that we—my mother and I—have hitherto lived in a small cottage at Elmwood, close to the Rectory gate."

"*Plait-il?*" said Ursule, looking bewildered.

"Ah, well, never mind. I ought to have remem-

bered that you could not be expected to know the localities. However, it is a cottage which my father at his death left to my mother, not for her use only, but absolutely—for her own, for her to give to whom she would, together with a sum of money amounting altogether to five thousand pounds." Clement did not add that this bequest was made because his father did not doubt that the money and the house would go to him as their natural channel; but he asked, "You understand me so far?"

"Yes, certainly," answered Ursule, absently; for her thoughts had wandered away to the story of the *fusillades* of Nantes.

"By a codicil of her will, lately executed, the Cottage at Elmwood, with a legacy of four thousand pounds, is left to Mademoiselle Ursule Lafon, and to her heirs for ever."

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur," said poor Ursule, trying to collect her thoughts, and feeling guilty of having got herself into a puzzle by her inattention. "I am afraid I do not comprehend."

"The Cottage is given to you by my mother."

"To me! Oh, Monsieur, it must all be a mistake?"

Clement thought so himself. The idea of his old home falling into the hands of this French girl was indescribably bitter. But he could only assure

her that it was as he had said. "The house and the money," he repeated.

Ursule's head was in a whirl. "Is it not rightly yours?" she said.

"I have enough," answered Mr. Blunt, shortly. "The person to be most pitied is my aunt. She receives only a thousand pounds."

"It is enormous!" sighed Ursule, to whom either sum seemed like a fabulous amount, especially when Mr. Blunt reduced them into francs; "but I see that I have the most. Ought not Madame d'Aurigny to have mine?"

"No," said Clement, smiling for the first time, and poking the fire into a cheerful blaze. "There are your heirs, you know, to be considered; and you have no right to give it away. Do not talk about what you will do to-night; we will all go back to the Cottage to-morrow, and then you shall think it over."

"But I may speak of it to Madame?"

"No; I must ask you to say nothing. I would rather tell my aunt myself; and she is not fit to bear additional excitement of any kind until the journey is over."

"I think this must all be a dream," said Ursule, standing up to go, and rubbing her eyes.

Clement lit her candle, and opened the door. "Good night, Mademoiselle Lafon," he said.

She reproached herself on the stairs with having forgotten his loss, and the pain it must have given him to mention details, in the midst of her own wonder. It was more wonder than delight; the whole affair seemed so inexplicable, so strange, that she could scarcely believe she had heard aright. Of course, the Cottage and the money would be as much Madame's as hers; they might live there, and Mr. Blunt also: she had even visions of M. and Madame Sanson joining them; and yet she shook her head at the idea of living in England. All her thoughts were in confusion, and her dreams that night were not more unconnected than were her waking fancies.

Mr. Blunt, meanwhile, thought bitterly of the change that hung over his head: it was a dreadful wrench to him to quit the Cottage; and he did not like the prospect of his old aunt's dependence upon this young, inexperienced, and, as he believed, selfish girl, whose generosity, although it might be equal to spasmodic efforts, would give way under any continuous strain. He wished that his mother had taken him into her confidence, and that he had persuaded her to reverse her gifts. He shrank from the task of telling Madame d'Aurigny. She had given up all her habits of life, and made an immense effort to fulfil her sister's wishes, and naturally would be hurt at a stranger receiving this proof of preference. To make an arrangement for her would

be his first care. Probably, Ursule would choose to let the Cottage as soon as the business-matter was explained to her, and return to France, to escape a country life which could have few charms for one totally unaccustomed to it. Dieppe was not Paris, certainly; but it possessed a certain stir and excitement very much beyond anything to be found at Elmwood, which made Clement almost smile at the comparison.

And for himself? Well, that question was tolerably easy to answer. Since the Cottage was gone, he must take up his quarters altogether in Defforton, instead of going there by train every morning. Whether he could afford to support his aunt with him as well—whether he could endure the continual restraint which her presence would cost him—whether she would herself be happy in the position—these were points which must be well weighed before decided upon, and he had scarcely strength or spirit for them as yet. He would wait. A day or two might assist him in the decision. Madame d'Aurigny would know the facts, and form her own wishes. Clement did not cast one thought of blame on his mother for the burden that was brought upon him, but he could not shut his eyes to the fact that a burden it must be.

The next morning found Madame d'Aurigny suffering no little pain, but eager to be off. She would not even remain until the later train, which

Clement thought would have given her time to rest; and the only means of quieting the restlessness which, at such times, grew actually distressing to witness was by forestalling the time fixed for their departure. They travelled in greater comfort this time, with Mr. Blunt to depend upon, and Ursule could sit quietly in the corner of the carriage, and look out at the beautiful trees, only losing their summer roundness to gain a glory in colour, at the grey homesteads, the quiet little streams patiently making their way through the fields, the stacks of corn, and the heaps of yellow apples in the orchards, which looked like Normandy. The wind was high; grey clouds drifted across the sky; here and there a bit of soft blue shone out between them. Mr. Blunt wondered why Ursule's face, remarkable for its quick changefulness of expression, had settled into that of calm, peaceful happiness. He was apt to be obstinate in his opinions, and he determined that she was looking forward to all that was before her, and to the comparative riches she was to enjoy. Never was anything further from her mind. She was thinking, as all beautiful things made her think, of Louis—his love and his happiness. To have lost him was to have lost the better half of herself; but not for an instant now did she grudge him what he had received. He had entered into his rest, and for her there was the work yet to do. The work! Yes. With all her weakness, her failures, her wilfulness,

there was the life-work which only the strongest could accomplish—a prospect which might well have cast her back despairing, had she not learned in that very time, which seemed the darkest in her life, to know that, would she but cling to the unfailing truth, there was for her a Strength that was supreme.

CHAPTER XII.

URSULE'S WELCOME.

"Who's he?"

"Dunno. A stranger."

"A stranger? 'Eave 'arf a brick at 'n."

Punch.

"My dear nephew, I see nothing but trees."

"We have left the village."

"But where, then?"

"Did you not see the houses and a few shops opposite the station as we left it?"

"I saw nothing to deserve the name of a town."

"We do not aspire to such dignity. If you want to find a town, you must go back to Defforton, through which we passed."

"Ah!" Madame d'Aurigny looked gloomy; Ursule watched every turn of the road with interest.

"I do not see any acacia-trees," she said, at last, in her turn.

"No; but these elms are finer than your poplars,"

returned Mr. Blunt, jealous for the honour of the Elmwood trees.

"Bah! what villanous roads!" she exclaimed, a little maliciously, as the fly jolted over a new layer of stones.

Clement felt unreasonably indignant, forgetful that he had himself provoked the retort by his comparison. The three drove on in silence, until he pointed out the glimmer of blue sea in the distance, as an object which belonged alike to both countries, and was almost pacified by Ursule's exclamation of admiration at the soft red colouring of the earth. Presently, he touched Madame d'Aurigny's arm.

"You cannot see more than a corner of the tower; but the church is there—just hidden by that clump of trees—and the churchyard where she is buried."

"Not in the cemetery! Poor Félicité!"

There was silence again for a few moments, when Mr. Blunt showed them the entrance to the Rectory, and in another minute the fly stopped.

"This is the Cottage," said Clement, gravely.

The Cottage, which fully answered to its name, stood back perhaps twenty feet from the high road. First came a green paling, then a little grass-plot, in one corner of which stood a fine horse-chestnut overhanging the road. Flowers were dotted about in small bright masses, and the covered-way of trellis-work which led to the house was twined over

with clambering plants. The Cottage was long and irregularly built; thatched, moreover, to Ursule's great wonder. An old servant came to the door, in whose face was written anything but welcome: between them, Madame d'Aurigny was carried into a passage, up a few stairs into a tiny hall, and then into a drawing-room of much better size and proportion than might have been expected from the appearance of the house. There was a bright fire burning, and it looked home-like and cheerful. Two long French windows opened upon the garden, which on this side was of considerable extent, walled all round, and broken with picturesque clumps of trees—a young and beautifully shaped cedar and two handsome ilexes among the number. Everything grew luxuriantly: rhododendrons feathered grandly over the grass; great fuchsias towered into shrubs, roses peeped over the wall; a venerable myrtle-tree and a white jessamine fairly covered one side of a gable, and pushed their branches into the thatch. On one side of the drawing-room was a conservatory, into which a door opened. From it, you could in a moment reach an old-fashioned kitchen-garden, which never failed to produce its annual abundant store of fruit—a garden with sunny nooks where rosy strawberries ripened, and white-heart cherries grew yellow and waxy.

From the top of the garden, near a greenhouse, in which the finest grapes flourished without further

heat than that of a Devonshire sun, you gained a good idea of the irregularities and length of the Cottage, and a delightful view of the sea, the red cliffs, and the harbour, with its shipping and long sandy reach, on the southern side. Ursule did not see all this at once. She was enchanted with the house and garden; but she did not dare openly to display much delight when she imagined Mr. Blunt's feelings, and encountered Sarah's hostile glances. She scarcely thought of it in the way they were thinking—that it was her own; only as a charming place where they were all perhaps going to live, and which looked too bright and flowery for the *tristesse* she had anticipated.

A bunch of flowers on the table were so prettily arranged, that Ursule could not resist saying, "How pretty!"

Mr. Blunt looked at them as he was giving Sarah the keys to bring wine for his aunt, and thought the same.

"Who put them there?" he asked.

"Miss Elsie, Sir," said Sarah, severely. "She came this morning, before I knew what she was about, or for certain I shouldn't have allowed her to mess up any such nonsense."

Clement translated as much of the speech as he thought advisable; and Ursule's eyes brightened at the idea of this Mademoiselle Elsie, who had effected a little friendly act of welcome. She wished to be

on amicable terms with everybody. When Sarah brought in the tray, she ran to help her so deftly and readily, that the old servant almost relented; but Madame d'Aurigny called her back to her side with a sharp "Ursule!" Madame felt her own dignity bound up in her companion, and feared lest the conduct of the latter might betray the manner in which they had lived.

A terrible chilliness grew over the whole party. Clement, however much he exerted himself, could not be otherwise than grave and silent; Madame looked sadly round at the memorials of Félicité; Ursule began to recognize the position in which she stood, and to feel as if her new possessions would not bring her much pleasure. It was a relief when a young retriever appeared at the window, and made such demonstrations of joy at seeing his master, that it became necessary to open the window and allow him to expend his delight in ecstatic capers.

"I have rested sufficiently to go to my room," said Madame, wearily.

"It is close at hand," Clement said; "we have only to get you up a few steps, and you will be in it."

"This is a pretty place, Clement. Poor Félicité, she must have had all that she could want! Everything is yours, I suppose?"

"You shall hear the arrangements to-morrow," answered Mr. Blunt; while Ursule felt herself be-

coming hot and red. "After you are settled in your room, I shall walk over to the Rectory; and, if Mademoiselle is not tired——"

"Do not call her Mademoiselle," said Madame, sharply. "She is Ursule Lafon."

"If you are not tired," repeated he, without taking any notice except to address her directly, "I dare say you will like to go into the garden by-and-bye. You won't lose yourself; and I don't know that there is anything very wonderful for you to see. But there are plenty of grapes in the greenhouse, if you will take the trouble to gather them."

"Thank you. I——"

"Ursule will have enough to do in attending to me," interposed Madame d'Aurigny for the second time; and Clement gave up the attempt to provide amusement for his guest. It was late in the afternoon before she was released by Madame's falling asleep, and then she was too tired herself to do much in the way of exploring. She went to her own room, full of delight at the quaint room, with its steps, angles, and crannies, its paper of twining roses, its green paint, and, above all, its old-fashioned window-seat, on which perching herself, she found the harbour and the sea lying before her, looking grey and angry in the fading light, and with a rising wind foretelling a storm. Presently she was glad to go down to the deserted drawing-room, and to sit over the fire,

learning diligently from her phrase-book by the light of the flickering flame.

Clement, meanwhile, had not far to walk—the green gate which led into the Rectory shrubbery was almost within a stone's throw of the Cottage door—Jock, in high delight at possessing his master at an unusual hour of the day, bounding before him, and relieving his spirits by hunting imaginary foes with an energy which was altogether superfluous. The gate swung heavily behind Clement as he walked up the drive towards the house; on each side lay the shrubbery, faced by a narrow border of flowers and grass. The Rectory itself was an old red brick house, mellowed by age into the colour of sandstone, and built squarely and solidly, with a good substantial porch and broad windows. Two or three tall climbers, a glossy-leaved banksia rose, and a Virginian creeper softened the rather hard outlines; and, in front of the house, the grass sloped away towards fields and trees—the sea, of course, visible, and making the point of the picture. The garden was not in the same good order as that at the Cottage; the shrubs wanted cutting back, and the creepers nailing. Clement stooped to pull up an obtrusive piece of groundsel which grew out of a clump of carnations close to the door. Jock, giving a sigh of resignation, lay down outside the porch, his nose between his paws, but his watchful eyes contradicting his attitude of rest.

Passing through a substantial, well-proportioned hall, Clement opened the door of the drawing-room and looked in. It was empty: an old grand piano, which almost filled one side, was open and strown with music, and there were other signs of recent feminine occupation in the one deep oriel window of the room; but no person was to be seen, and, retiring upon his steps, he made his way to a small apartment, professedly used as a breakfast-room, but in reality given over to the disposal of the younger members of the family. Two girls were there—Anne and Elsie—at first sight apparently as great a contrast as sisters well could be.

There was no marked difference in their height. Anne was, perhaps, an inch the shorter; but she stooped, and Elsie was as straight as a dart, lithe, and carrying her head like a queen. Anne had a round homely face, with irregular features, and no charm about it, but that of a certain frank honesty. Elsie's eyes were large and velvety, her skin was clear, her nose small and straight, her mouth and chin delicately cut. The sisters' hair was of almost the same shade of brown; but while the general impression of Anne's consisted in the idea that it was arranged in the most unbecoming manner, Elsie's was loosely twisted up in a fashion which could not have been improved upon by an artist. It was the same with their dress. The material was the same, the trimmings exactly similar, and yet the contrast

was carried out as thoroughly as in all other points. Clement, intimately as he knew them, could never fail to be struck with it when he saw the two sisters together.

There was a little restraint in their manner when they came forward to greet him, as if they were afraid lest something they might say or do would jar upon the grief that had fallen upon him. Anne asked him, nervously, whether he had seen her father.

"I don't know where he is; but I will try to find him, if you like," she said.

"Thank you, I have no reason for disturbing him; I believe I chiefly wanted to see Miss Villars."

"And she has driven out with Bella."

"Oh, Clement," exclaimed Elsie, unable any longer to keep back the question which she was longing to put, "are they come?"

"Hush, Elsie!" whispered Anne, looking distressed.

"Yes," answered Mr. Blunt, throwing himself into a basket-chair, "they are come. My poor aunt looks dreadfully worn out; I feel certain she ought to see Mr. Ferguson, but whether she will or not is another matter."

"And this French young lady——?"

"Well, yes," said Clement, a little bitterly, "she is come, too."

"Have you told her? What does she say?"

"She could not very well say much: I suppose she is fully alive to her luck. I should not care, so long as I believed she would——" be kind to Madame d'Aurigny, he was going to add, but prudently forbore to finish his sentence. "The fact is, I imagine, that to see the old place in strangers' hands must always be hateful, and so one may as well make up one's mind to the prospect."

"I hate strangers."

"Well done, Elsie."

"I do, and I don't care who hears me say so. They are always disagreeable and in the way. At all events, I hope this Miss——"

"Ursule Lafon."

"This Miss Lafon acknowledges that she never saw any place so pretty as Elmwood."

"I suspect she gives the palm of beauty to Dieppe."

"Then she can't know anything about it. She must be horrid."

"What nonsense!" put in Anne, impatiently. "Elsie, you are always thinking about things being pretty; so far as that goes, I dare say one place is as good as another."

"Anne would not mind if we lived in a country as flat as this table, with two or three old pollarded elms growing out of the middle of it!"

"So long as there were no people," sighed Anne.

"I won't have you two setting yourselves up

against my visitors," announced Clement, authoritatively. "I mean you to befriend Mademoiselle Lafon, to make her at home here, if she continues to live at the Cottage, and to teach her English."

"Does she talk nothing but French?" exclaimed Elsie, in a tone of horror. "Oh, how dreadful! how detestable! I shall keep out of her way."

"You can manage better than I can," said Anne. "I am sure I cannot say three words without a mistake. Clement, I wish she had not come."

"Perhaps Bella could talk," hazarded her sister doubtfully.

"You are no better than two foolish children. Don't you see how much you may improve yourselves?" said their cousin, by way of answer.

"What's the use?" replied Elsie, wilfully. "We don't mean ever to go abroad, and accents and all the rest of it are no use in scrambling through a French exercise."

"There spake the sagacious Walter."

"It is quite true."

"Quite—if the worth of a language consists in being able to scramble through its exercises."

"Pray do not quarrel with him, Elsie," said Anne, anxiously. "There is no occasion for your having very much to do with Miss Lafon."

"Then you do not acknowledge the duties of hospitality?"

Clement was certainly in a singularly contradic-

tory humour, and more disposed than he had yet been to take Ursule's part.

"Yes, I do. What *do* you mean?" said poor Anne, looking ready to cry.

"Never mind. I beg your pardon, Anne; I am sure you will be all that is kind; and, as for Elsie, she has already bestowed her welcome in the shape of her flowers."

"Oh, she is welcome to everything except my French."

Clement made no answer. Anne went back to the slow and painful copying of a receipt into a manuscript book, and Elsie took the bit of groundsel from her cousin's hand, and twisted it in and out between the bars of a canary's cage.

"You have not told us, after all, what she is like," she said, returning to the subject which occupied all their thoughts.

"Not a bit like her brother, poor boy! His was one of the purest, most spiritualized faces I ever saw. I have seen such a one in a photograph from one of the old Italian masters, but in real life never."

"And he is dead. Did she feel it very much?"

"I don't know."

"Did they live alone?"

"Quite alone, as far as I saw; at the top of the queerest old house, with an oak staircase that was fit for a palace, and all the rest miserable! How many more questions am I to answer, Elsie?"

"Twenty; and then we will look at poor Anne's receipt-book, and we shall find neatly copied out—'To five Miss Lafons add the yolk of three eggs.' Will that be our new pudding, Anne?"

"I cannot think why cook is so fond of trying new puddings," said Anne, despairingly. "The old ones are much better."

"You and Elsie are true conservatives, Anne—puddings, strangers, and all! Well, Elsie, what final demand trembles upon your tongue?"

"Is she pretty?"

"I cannot tell; I wish I could. She has a brown face and bright eyes, with hair to match, short and wavy. Is that being pretty?"

"It doesn't sound so. But I am never certain, Clement, how much to believe of your descriptions."

"Come and see for yourself to-morrow, then."

"Aunt Clare is sure to go."

"And Bella is dying of curiosity."

"Is she?" said Mr. Blunt, curtly. He looked so sad, that the sisters did not like to say anything more. Elsie was afraid she had been indiscreet; and Anne, who was always fearful of hurting people's feelings, stooped more than ever over the table.

"You have heard nothing about Joyce's coming, I suppose?" he asked, after a long silence.

"No; the last letter said she was too busy to leave London. Mr. Clayton has been ill, and Joyce has a great deal on her hands. It must be dreadful

to be in that horrible London all through the summer and autumn!"

Decided likes and dislikes were among the Follaton peculiarities, arising in a great measure from their having lived almost entirely among themselves, and received no modifications of their opinions. It must be fairly conceded that any life differing from their own ran a chance of being called horrible, and Clement took no notice of the adjective; in fact, in this instance he was disposed to endorse it.

"I wish she were here," was all he remarked.

"So do I," answered Elsie, heartily. "Are you going, Clement?"

"Yes, if there is no chance of my seeing Miss Villars. But, I say, Anne, I would sooner one of you came to-morrow than Bella. You must not let these nonsensical fancies stand in your way."

Anne looked awkward, twisted her shoulders after an ungainly fashion, and murmured something which was inaudible. Clement treated it as a promise by saying, "Don't forget," as he went out of the room, and the two sisters were left alone.

"Poor fellow! he looks wretchedly fagged and ill," said Elsie, coming over to her sister, and leaning her two hands on the table.

"Yes; I could not bear to see him."

"I have no patience with all this unnecessary bother that he has to endure. As if Mrs. Blunt could not have left the Cottage to him, instead of

entailing no end of misery and disagreeables! It is just like her!"

"Oh, Elsie!"

"It is. People have no right to expect their injustice to be praised, because they are dead."

"There is that old story, you know."

"So there is! Do you know, I had almost forgotten it," said Elsie, thoughtfully. "I suppose that does put some romance into the affair."

Anne could not understand romance improving anything; but she did not answer, because she was taken up with ruefully contemplating a large blot in the very middle of her neatly copied receipt.

"Oh, dear, I have spoilt it all!" she exclaimed.

"I don't see why you should mind," said Elsie, mischievously. "I dislike it because it is ugly; but you often say you don't see any difference."

"It is not the ugliness, but because it is untidy," protested Anne.

"Oh, well, I suppose order takes the place of beauty in some minds."

"And I had resolved to cure myself of that habit of making blots. I wanted very much to have kept this book clean."

"Nobody will find fault with you; that's one comfort!"

Anne's eyes filled with tears.

"You don't really think so! But then you don't require it as I do. I feel continually as if I were

going all wrong, and wanted to be picked up and put right again."

"Like the dropped stitches in Aunt Clare's stocking," said Elsie, laughing merrily, but at the same time stooping over her sister to give her a hearty kiss. "Anne, I believe we poor motherless girls ought to have some indulgence."

Anne shook her head, unwilling to follow Elsie's flights of imagination. "I wish you were the eldest!" she said, with a sigh.

"As if I did not domineer sufficiently over you without that advantage!"

"I dare say it is as much that I might escape things as for any other reason," was Anne's not very lucid explanation. "Oh, those dreadful dinner-parties! I never know what to do—what to say! and one feels a goose with the other girls talking as if they liked it. I wish people would eat their dinners at home! If Mrs. Chambers persuades papa into making me go with her to Ordleigh at Christmas, what will become of me!"

"I never mean to go to parties," said Elsie, decidedly. "I should run away in the middle. One daughter is quite enough, and by that time you will have become used to them."

"I don't think that is possible. Luckily, Bella will enjoy them."

"Bella! Yes; Bella will enjoy anything in the shape of a show off."

"I wonder if it will be good for her? If there were any one from whom Bella would take advice? She is afraid of papa."

"Yes; she is afraid of him, and I fear—Anne, do you know, I am sure Bella is not open and honest."

"I try not to believe it, but—I don't know. I wish she minded Aunt Clare!"

"Oh, but, then, nobody minds Aunt Clare. Hark! I hear papa calling. It is you, Anne; make haste!"

Clement Blunt did not return directly to the Cottage from the Rectory. He went along a narrow path which pierced the shrubberies, and out of a little turnstile gate into the churchyard. The grey perpendicular tower, nobly flanked by three fine elms, was the pride of the neighbourhood, and the point of attraction for all travelling antiquaries: those upon whom it had a dearer claim of love believed that nothing could equal St. Mary's tower, in its quiet and solemn beauty. Yet the church itself had fallen into bad repair, and whitewash and high pews reigned triumphantly within. In the churchyard, what beauty there was belonged only to the natural form of the ground, the stately trees, and the little transparent brook which ran directly across it; for the grave-stones themselves were of the ugliest type, and the grass was coarse and ragged.

Clement made his way to a corner where the

graves were less crowded, and where, in a vault surrounded with railings, his mother had been laid to rest by the side of her husband and the little ones who had gone early to their Home. He thought of her as a son, and, although his love for her was not that intense affection which he had given to his father, he felt very desolate as he looked down upon her resting-place. She had been fond of him in a fashion; but her heart had been given to another son, his elder brother, a merry, high-spirited, impetuous boy. He came home from school ill; the illness turned to fever; little Clement took the infection, and both were at the point of death. It really seemed as if Mrs. Blunt, who had almost demanded her favourite boy's life with all the passionate force of her will, never forgave Clement for having been the one to struggle through the illness while Hugh was taken. There was his name before his brother now, in letters worn away by exposure—"Hugh Clayton Blunt, aged fourteen." There was the space where hers would be added to the list.

It is possible that the lack of, at all events, outward affection had tended, in some degree, to harden Clement, who possessed a good deal of womanly sensitiveness, and was all the more likely to grow severe. Madam Blunt—as the people about were in the habit of calling her, from some idea of thus marking her French origin—never indulged in de-

monstrations of feeling, or sought sympathy from others. She nursed her sorrows without allowing them to be shared, even by her son. She became rigid, inflexible, unsparing. She was generous-hearted, and cared not how freely she gave when the fancy seized her; but also she was not sufficiently generous to brook the burden of an obligation. To the last she had been the same, and not even the softening influences of sickness and pain had betrayed her into what she called weakness.

Her son knew something of this as he stood mournfully looking down. He understood the character of the impulse which led her to act as she had done towards the granddaughter of the old couple who had saved her life. She could not endure to go to the grave feeling as if they had never been repaid; she would repay them in the person of Ursule, at whatever cost. Clement had always known that he must leave the Cottage, and devote himself to his work; but he had cherished the hope of returning to it at a future time. He did not blame his mother; but he felt it hard—the more so from her not having taken him into her confidence, and allowed the news to fall upon him unprepared. It was the old avoidance of sympathy which had pained him throughout his life, and followed him to her very grave. He turned away with a sigh, and walked rapidly back to the Cottage, sore at heart, and, although he would not have acknowledged it,

in great need of some comforting any kindly words.

Ursule, poring by fire-light over the English words which refused to accommodate themselves to her pronunciation, heard a step in the passage, and a hand upon the lock. But when the hand was withdrawn, and the steps retired, she made up her mind that Mr. Blunt was afraid of finding her in the drawing-room, and wished with all her heart that she knew what it was right to do, and that she had remained in her own room. She was correct in her supposition. Clement had entered the house almost mechanically; but at the door of the drawing-room the idea flashed upon him that he might come upon Ursule ensconded there, and the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* was too distasteful to be encountered. He was scarcely, however, better pleased, when he took refuge in his room, to find Sarah unpacking his port-manteau, and resolutely determined upon a delivery of her opinions.

"Is my aunt comfortable?" he inquired.

"She's asleep, if that's what you mean. Oh, Mr. Clement!"

"Well, Sarah?" he said, kindly. She had been a faithful servant for many years, and he felt she deserved consideration.

"It can't be true. My mistress has never left the house to that French girl?"

"There was a reason for it, you know. My

mother was under an obligation to Mademoiselle Lafon's family."

"There couldn't be no right reason for taking it from her own son. For my part, I don't believe the will would hold."

"Hush, Sarah," said her master, authoritatively; "you don't know what you are saying. My mother's desire would have been enough for me, without other safeguards. The Cottage was her own. She was not a person to do things lightly; and if she desired in this manner to repay some of the debt she owed to the Lagets, she was quite right to do it."

Clement's manner was such that Sarah was awed. She only ventured to express her irritation by a certain vehemence in the arrangement of his clothes, and by murmuring, under her breath, "A French girl!"

"Thank you, Sarah," said Mr. Blunt, laughing; "you will perhaps remember that I am half French myself."

"She can't speak a word fit to be understood!" grumbled the old servant, taking no notice. "Don't you suppose, Mr. Clement, that I am going to stay here with her?"

"No one wants you to do what you dislike," said he, impatiently; "but it is impossible for things to settle themselves in twenty-four hours. As yet, my aunt does not even know of either Mademoiselle

Lafon's legacy or her own: nothing is fixed, or thought about. I suppose you don't mean to go off, and leave us to look after ourselves?"

He spoke irritably, feeling as if this announcement of Sarah's was the herald of a swarm of annoyances which were likely to come buzzing about his ears, and augured ill for future peace; and she treated his speech in feminine fashion, by proceeding as if she had not heard it.

"A miss like that, with no years to her back, and no head on her shoulders, I'll be bound, to come and put us all about! Even Jock, poor fellow, doesn't know what to make of it."

Clement could not help smiling; for Sarah and Jock were natural enemies, and this new-born compassion had only sprung up since the old servant considered that a common foe had appeared upon the scene. He took no other notice; and Sarah's heart smote her when she saw how weary and troubled he looked, and how the lines had deepened in his cheeks. Bitter enmity against poor Ursule appeared to her to be the most effectual manner of proving her devotion to her young master, and assuredly, if wishes could have carried Ursule back again to Dieppe, her own and Sarah's would have solved the difficulty of transport at once.

Clement did not go down again for the night. Ursule escaped to Madame d'Aurigny's room, lest her presence might be shutting him out from the

drawing-room. The wind, which had been blowing all day in occasional violent gusts, had risen, by this time, to a hurricane; the rain dashed against the little windows, the roar of the sea came over the fields and marshes, and, to add to the noise, the rats evidently held high holiday between the old walls.

It was but a cheerless welcome to Ursule's English home!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RECTORY AND ITS WORLD.

They used always to say, "We and the world;" for they imagined themselves to be not only the half of the world, but also by far the better half. The duckling thought it was possible to be of a different opinion; but that the hen would not allow.—*The Ugly Duckling.*

It has been said that Mr. Follaton—the rector of Elmwood, and the brother of Mrs. Clayton—was a widower. He had married, greatly to the surprise of his friends, who expected that he would end his days as Fellow of St. Peter's, instead of accepting the first living of which he was offered the refusal, and immediately proceeding to make his hopes and wishes known to the daughter of an old tutor. But, if he disappointed his friends' expectations, he made up for it afterwards by proving them to have been unmistakably right in their prognostications that the old life was better suited to him than the new.

When little apple-faced Rose was born, his wife died, and her sister had ever since that time lived at the Rectory—a kindly, soft-eyed woman, whose greatest difficulty lay in the power of decision, even

upon the question of whether beef or mutton should furnish the daily dinner. For five years the care and education of the five motherless children fell upon her; but at the end of that time Mr. Follaton announced suddenly that Walter would be sent to Marlborough, and that he had engaged a governess for the girls.

His family had learned to receive announcements from him without surprise. He was of a singularly abstracted turn of mind, slow to perceive, and utterly impervious to a hint, taken up altogether with books and theological questions, disliking society, and almost childishly secure in his confidence that matters once rightly set in motion would go on as steadily as the wheels of the church clock at Elmwood, which kept the best time of any clock in the neighbourhood. When, however, his eyes were once opened to the necessity for change, the rector was too conscientious and true-minded to shut them again. He allowed the idea to revolve, slowly, it is true, but it must have been thoroughly, since, without any previous warning, his decision would be issued in a complete and final shape, against which there was no appeal. As has been said, after his wife's death, her sister lived with them at the Rectory—an arrangement which made Mr. Follaton very content, and five years passed away without the idea of change crossing his mind; but, at the end of that time, another relation spent a few weeks there, made

use of her eyes and ears during the visit, and mentioned her conclusions to Mr. Follaton in very plain terms. Responsibilities to which we do not grow, but are transplanted, are apt to weigh heavily; and the care of these motherless children was fast wearing out Clare Villars, body and mind. She was so anxious about their right training, that she blamed herself for their faults as much as she blamed them, and it was pretty evident the strain was too great. What was to be the remedy? The relation was a wise woman, and she suggested nothing; she only delivered herself of her opinions, and left the rector to watch and draw his conclusions—the result being, that within a month's time the changes took place that have been already mentioned.

Perhaps the household at the Rectory was more influenced than it knew by the soft, shrinking woman whom every one loved, and yet no one seemed to mind. She had taught herself painfully the routine of economic cares which were necessary, and nothing was easier than for the cook to prove her mistaken in any point she pleased; nevertheless, there was something in the perfect trust she placed in her servants' honesty, in the sorrowful look which saddened her whole face whenever anything was proved against them, which was not without its effect upon the most hardened. Certainly, as one of the number remarked, there was no pleasure in 'deceiving Miss Villars. And, although Clement smiled at his own

fancy in supposing she could be of service, it was for her coming that, on the day following their arrival at Elmwood, he looked and longed impatiently.

Everything appeared to him to be in a singular transition state. For himself, he could not so much as read the newspaper with any degree of attention, his mind was in so restless and feverish a condition. The old familiar things looked strangely at him, as if aware they were no longer his. He avoided the rooms, lest Ursule should be in them: the touch of the stranger was over all. And the interview with his aunt must be gone through on this day: he should hear what she wished to do; he must prepare for wounded feeling and reproaches, and break gently to her what had not so much as crossed her mind. Sarah walked about the house dusting the chintzes in a reproachful manner, and continually expressing in her face that she had never expected such a blow to fall upon her. It certainly was hard that he who was the chief sufferer should have everybody's burden to bear. "Presently, I suppose," said poor Clement, bitterly, "I shall have to arrange who is to live here with that girl, and what she is to pay her cook and housemaid!"

Madame d'Aurigny did not come down-stairs. She made Ursule pull about the furniture in her room, and alter it to her liking; and then she got up and dressed herself in a strange figured dressing-

gown, and lay upon a little sofa at the foot of the bed, with all her grey curls arranged in order under her cap, in case visitors should come to see her, as she hoped with all her heart would be the case. Perhaps it was fortunate that she disliked Sarah, and pronounced her face too melancholy to be endured, since the old servant's good offices were not likely to be rendered with any alacrity. Madame was not unkind to Ursule. If she remained at the Cottage, as she reflected, it would be very desirable to have some one to pass away the time for her during her nephew's daily absences at Defforton; and it would not do for Ursule to take it into her head to return to Dieppe—certainly not as yet, at all events. So she graciously permitted her to sit and talk over her first impressions of the place, and her wonder at there being nothing straight about the house, with its steps, and back staircases, and crooked passages.

"What is one to do, Madame?" she asked, a little hopelessly. "At the farm-house there were cheeses to make."

"Child, do not talk so imprudently! Here you are to live the life of a lady, not of a farmer's daughter."

"But ladies must do something," persisted Ursule. "Is it permitted to go to market?"

"I do not know. I imagine so—there can be nothing derogatory in that; but I will ask my nephew.

He has sent up to inquire at what hour I shall be visible, and I have fixed twelve o'clock."

Poor Madame always said "my nephew" with a sort of pride: it was very new to her to feel the ties of relationship.

"Ursule!"

"Madame?"

"That picture opposite to me, over the fire-place, who is it?"

"The old lady with the bright eye and grey hair? Is it not a little like you? It must be your sister."

"Félicité? Félicité like that! Bah! of what are you thinking? Félicité was upright and smooth-skinned, with hair darker than yours. What foolishness to suppose that old woman to be Félicité, who was not so many years older than I am!"

"How should I know?" said Ursule, soothingly. "Very likely it is some relation of Monsieur Blunt's father."

Madame did not answer; but she watched the picture earnestly, with a wistful look upon her shrunken face, until she sighed and turned away her head. It was indeed a likeness of Madam Blunt; but Ursule never heard her allude again to the subject. Presently she recommenced.

"Ursule!"

"Madame?"

"What can be seen from my window?"

"First of all the little garden, then the road,

then fields and an orchard, and a bit of the railway, and the beautiful sea. Oh, there is a great deal!"

"A great deal, child! What is there in all that? I mean, what is there to see, to distract? What passes in the road?"

Ursule was obliged to confess that a cart and a flock of sheep were all that had come under her notice, and Madame sighed again.

"This England is very *triste*," she said, shivering; then, suddenly brightening, told the girl that she might go, for she heard her nephew in the passage; and Ursule, guessing his errand, was only too ready to escape, and, tying a light hood over her head, ran out into the garden.

Madame greeted her nephew as warmly as if she had been left in solitude all the morning, which, it crossed his mind, had probably been the case. No one could have been more kind and gentle towards her than he. He felt the greatest pity for what she had been called upon to do, and as if he ought to think no sacrifice too great which could soften the trial to her. He spoke of his mother, of her desire to see her sister once more, so that her wishes became imperative; and he dwelt as long as he could upon this fact, which evidently gratified his aunt. And then he went on to touch upon Ursule—his mother's delight when her prompt conjecture proved to be true—her eagerness to see the girl—her strong anxiety to repay, in some measure, the debt of gra-

titude she owed to the old Lagets. Madame listened with attention.

"Well, my dear Clement, you will probably have no objection to her remaining here with us? My comfort requires some one; it would be a convenience to me, and a provision for her."

"I am afraid," said her nephew, gravely, "that the arrangement of who shall live in this house does not depend upon either you or me. Mademoiselle Lafon is the sole person to be consulted."

"Ursule?"

"Precisely so."

"Clement," said Madame d'Aurigny, nervously tapping the side of the sofa, "you are talking riddles; and I hate riddles. What has Ursule to do with this house?"

"It is her own."

"Her own? Bah! you are a droll—you jest!"

"I am in no jesting humour. I repeat, the Cottage and, what is more, four thousand pounds were left by my mother to Ursule Lafon."

"Four thousand pounds!"

Clement nodded. Madame's colour changed; but, to his amazement and relief, she broke into no invectives. It seemed as if, with her, Félicité's will was not to be resisted—even in the grave. She received the news with a touch of quiet dignity which he had not expected, and for which he was really

grateful. She was pleased to hear of her own legacy, and then said calmly,

"After all, this will make no difference; we shall all be together here."

"Mademoiselle Ursule may have many words to say to such an arrangement."

"Nonsense! she is but a child; she must do what I bid her." A remembrance of the many times Ursule had resisted her attempts at authority rose up and troubled Madame at that moment. But things were different now, and she was far more amenable and gentle. Of course she would do as Madame directed. "Fetch her here," she said aloud: "all this can be settled at once."

So Clement had to go in search of Ursule, whom he found in the garden, with her attention divided between a bunch of grapes and her little phrase-book. She looked reluctant to go in, when he explained that he had been sent to fetch her. "Is she angry?" she asked, with the shrinking she felt whenever the idea crossed her mind that these things were actually her own.

"Not at all," answered Clement; "but it seems to me that I ought to give you warning. My aunt may talk as if she considered it proper that you should yield your will to hers, and act in this matter in the manner she has decided to be best. Now, it is right that you should be perfectly uninfluenced, and I particularly desire that you should not hastily

consent to arrangements of any kind whatever until you have consulted the trustees my mother appointed."

"Why, you are a lawyer yourself, Monsieur," said she, looking up with a smile. "I will leave everything in your hands."

"That is exactly what I do not wish you to do," he answered, with some irritation. "I am the last person who should have anything to do with the matter. I wish you to act entirely independently of my aunt and me."

"I wish——" began Ursule, abruptly; then she paused, and went on hurriedly, "Do not think me ungrateful, Monsieur, for your mother's goodness—I shall never cease to love her for it; but I cannot help wishing that she had not given your pretty house to me. If she had but sent me a message of friendship, and you or Madame had the rest——"

She looked in his face as she spoke, with an expression so beseeching and humble that his feelings were touched with a sense of past injustice. It shamed him to think that he was visiting his own vexation upon this innocent girl, herself almost unprotected in a land of strangers. It was not the loss of fortune or the value of the land that he begrudged—to all this she was welcome enough; it was the old home, the home of his boyhood, which he could not bear to think had passed out of his hands for ever; and it was the want of confidence which pre-

vented his mother telling him of her intentions that galled him most of all. When he answered Ursule, it was more kindly than he had ever spoken to her before.

"I can quite understand," he said: "it must be a burden to you, and I am afraid none of us are very kind in trying to make it otherwise. But you will think differently by-and-bye; and, believe me, it is well that you have independent persons to look after your interests. I will write a note to Mr. Gray or Mr. Ross, and ask one of them to come out from Defforton by an early train to-morrow. They are persons whom my mother altogether trusted."

"Thank you," in a grateful tone, was all that Ursule could say before they reached the door of Madame d'Aurigny's room. But even there, with his hand on the lock, Mr. Blunt paused.

"Remember," he said, "you must make no promises until you have seen Mr. Gray. You understand, do you not?"

"But yes, perfectly;" and they entered the room.

"You have heard, Ursule? I hope you are sufficiently alive to my sister's bounty. It was, indeed, a fortunate thing for you that I inhabited the *premier* of the Sansons' house," began Madame at once.

"Yes, Madame," said Ursule, simply, though a little smile flickered about the corners of her mouth.

"And I have done my best to instruct you to conduct yourself in a *comme-il-faut* manner."

"Yes, Madame."

"I shall still continue to instruct you. Of course, this will make no difference. You will reside here: there is nothing to take you back to France; and I and my nephew shall reside with you."

"Of course, Madame."

"Stop!" said Clement, eagerly; "nothing of the sort must be agreed upon. Ursule—Mademoiselle, you have already promised to engage yourself to nothing until you have taken advice."

She looked at him with astonished eyes. "You did not mean *that*!" she said. "Why, it is simply a matter of course. What else could there be?"

"Hold your tongue, Clement," said his aunt, for the first time speaking irritably to him. "It is, as she says, a finished affair. Go away, and let me talk with Ursule."

"Mademoiselle, I shall not permit you to bind yourself to any course of action. You are to consult your trustees."

"Not upon Madame's living here?"

"Upon everything which concerns your arrangements."

"Of what are you thinking, Monsieur!" exclaimed Ursule, indignantly, turning round with flashing eyes; "of what do you believe me capable? Is it possible that I should have the baseness, the wickedness, to refuse a home to Madame, when it is her own sister who has put it into my power to offer it?"

"Wait, I say, until you have seen the trustees," said Clement, pacing up and down the room with perturbed steps.

"I will not wait. Why should I wait? No one shall judge for me in such a matter as this. Madame," continued Ursule, kneeling by her side, and taking the wasted hand in her own, "you understand me better; you know that sooner—a thousand times sooner—than that you should go away from here, I would return to Dieppe, and not accept a *sou* of this hateful money. I would far rather do so now," said the girl, trembling with excitement, and looking angrily at Clement.

"You are a good girl, Ursule," said Madame, touched by her warmth of tone, "you have a good heart; and my nephew only speaks as these men always speak," she added, contemptuously. "Certainly, I will remain with you, and Clement also."

"No," said the latter, standing before the window and looking out; "my home will for the future be in Defforton. It must have been so, whoever had the Cottage," he said, as Madame d'Aurigny made an exclamation of remonstrance.

"You are not going to separate yourself from me?" she said, reproachfully.

"My dear aunt, I must work, and that a little harder than I have hitherto done. I have lived here for my mother's sake; now the time is come when I must throw myself into the business more

completely. I am ready to offer you such a home as I can furnish in the town——”

“It is impossible for me to move again,” said Madame, with petulance.

“Madame remains here,” said Ursule, defiantly.

Clement glancing at her, half vexed and half amused at her persistency, was struck with the beauty of her face, consisting more in expression than in feature, and now lit up with the glow of warm feeling. Colour had flushed her brown cheek; her eye sparkled; she looked like a small heroine as she stood by Madame’s side, drawn up to her full height. He acknowledged to himself that he liked her all the better for her valour and constancy; and yet he was provoked at the failure of his precautions—at the notion that his aunt willingly allowed herself to be dependent upon her. But he smiled very kindly as he said,

“You are a good friend, Mademoiselle Ursule!”

“Bah! what a fuss you both make!” said Madame. “There is nothing else to be done, that I can see; that is, provided I arrange to stay here. Still, Clement, I wish that you would reconsider your decision. It will be unbearably *triste* in this absolute country without you. Who are your neighbours—your society?”

“There are my cousins at the Rectory—plenty of them; there are Mr. and Mrs. Chambers, living at the Hall, about three quarters of a mile off; there

is the doctor, Mr. Ferguson, and the Miss Rosewardens, and—those are all I can think of just now.”

“And in the town—this town you speak of? But it is no use; it is impossible for me to move: this pain in my back will drive me distracted.”

“I wish I could do anything for you,” said Clement, much concerned.

“Nothing—nothing! Ursule, can you not teach yourself to stand still? Every moment goes through me.”

When these fits of nervous irritability came on, the more quiet she was kept the better. Clement stole out of the room, determined to bring Dr. Ferguson to the rescue before the day was over, and inclined, for the first time, to pity Ursule for the constant strain upon her forbearance.

“I like her for speaking out heartily, just now,” he thought to himself. “There must be some good in her. She can’t be utterly frivolous and selfish, or she would have been glad to have rid herself of the burden; but no—she showed no signs of it, at all events. What on earth will become of her here?”

When luncheon was announced, he sent notice to Ursule; and Sarah returned, labouring with indignation at the difficulty of understanding what either said, but, as far as she could tell, the young Frenchwoman wanted to have her dinner up there

with Madame. "Nasty foreign ways!" formed her commentary.

In the afternoon came Miss Villars, Elsie, and with them, in spite of Clement's injunction, Bella. Elsie walked in, looking shy and uncomfortable, until she had glanced round the room, and became aware that no enemy was there in the form of a stranger. Bella's countenance, on the contrary, sank, when she had even more rapidly made the reconnoissance. She was a tall, womanly-looking girl, fair-haired and light-eyed; but the eyes, though pretty in colour, were set too closely together for beauty, and there was, even to a casual observer, a want of the frank-hearted openness which proclaimed itself in her sister's face. To strangers, however, her manner was far more pleasing; she was free from Anne's awkwardness and Elsie's brusquerie, and she possessed, to a rare degree, either tact or what passed for it in society.

Miss Villars was a tall, drooping, graceful-looking woman, with a sweet gentle smile and a shrinking, almost painful, nervousness of manner, which made her falter and hesitate when she so much as heard her own unsupported voice. She was one of those women whose hardest task it seems to be to stand alone in the world, obliged to decide and act upon their own responsibilities. In her case the care of the large household at the Rectory was a burden which only the most conscientious feeling of duty could

have induced her to undertake. She had not the smallest love of power in her disposition. No one knew what it cost her to give a reprimand, and no offender suffered so much from the rebuke or dismissal as Miss Villars herself. And although, whatever the pain to herself, she was too right-minded to avoid what she had made up her mind it was her duty to do, she was also of so transparent and guileless a mind, so ready to believe good, so prompt with her own excuses for the offender, that many a wrong dealing was never brought to light, and many a sinner avoided punishment. Yet it was to her, with her ready sympathetic charity, that Clement, in the midst of his doubts and annoyances, turned with no little relief.

"Thank you, with all my heart, for coming, Miss Villars."

"It must be terribly dreary for you," said she, holding out both hands to him, with her soft eyes full of tears.

"It is all very strange. I scarcely know myself or the house. But I want to enlist your kindness on behalf of my two new-comers, who lie heavy on my mind. It has been a severe blow for my poor old aunt to leave her country at her time of life, and—to meet with this shock after all. Here she seems to be cast away; everything is strange—mode of life, food, people. I pity her with all my heart. I cannot see how she is to avoid being miserable.

And she is in great suffering, to add to it all. Miss Villars, what is to be done?"

Clement smiled to himself, the instant he had put the question, at having supposed it possible for Miss Villars to give advice; and yet there was some degree of comfort in her "Poor thing, how very sad for her!" because it said, plainly, how gladly she would help him, if she could.

"There has been this complication about the house to increase our difficulties," he said, continuing to pour out his troubles: "I had thought that my aunt could live with me at Defforton; but she seems to think it impossible for her to undertake another remove, and I believe, indeed, that she is quite unfit for it."

"But," suggested Miss Villars, with hesitation, "surely it will be happier for Mademoiselle Lafon to keep Madame d'Aurigny with her—that is, supposing she lives at the Cottage."

"You think so, do you?" asked Clement, eagerly.

"I—I am no judge, but I should have thought so. She is very young, poor child, is she not?"

"But do you think it right that she should undertake such a burden as the care of my aunt must be, when there is no real tie?"

"It seems to me as if circumstances had formed the tie. And Madame d'Aurigny must have been very kind to her?"

"Yes," said Clement, doubtfully. He was less sure of this fact than formerly.

"Then she will like to do all she can to show her gratitude," said Miss Villars, warmly. "Having no mother, poor thing, it will be so pleasant for her to feel she is not quite alone."

"Mademoiselle Lafon is going to stay at Elmwood, is she not, Clement?" asked Bella, who had pretended to be absorbed in looking through a photograph-book, but had not missed a single word of the conversation.

"I believe so."

"I am very glad."

"I am very sorry," bluntly said Elsie, who had also heard everything, only took no pains to hide her interest.

"Sorry! Elsie, my dear child!" gently remonstrated Miss Villars.

"Sorry! How unkind you are!" This from Bella.

"Yes, I am sorry," persisted Elsie. "I am certain we shall never suit; she will not like our ways, nor we hers. I dare say she will give herself airs and graces; but, whether she does or not, we don't want new people. One never knows what to say to them."

"Elsie is thinking about her French genders," said Bella, excusingly.

"Well, they do make it worse," her sister said, good-humouredly.

"My dear——" began Miss Villars; but she hesitated, and Bella broke in, in her quiet voice,

"Do you like Mademoiselle Lafon, Clement?"

"I?" he answered, taken aback by the question.

"I—I hardly know her yet. Yes; indeed, I think there is a great deal to like in her: she is behaving very well in this business."

"I hope we shall see her."

"Nonsense, Bella!" exclaimed Elsie. "What is the use of worrying her now, when there will be a hundred other opportunities?"

"But I want you to see her; I want her to feel not utterly friendless," said Clement. "It seems to me that we have each our own affairs to look after, and she is the most desolate of all. Elsie, put those very fierce opinions of yours out of sight, if you please, or you will frighten her from Elmwood for ever. Miss Villars, will you come up-stairs and be introduced to my aunt? Then Mademoiselle Lafon will probably consent to make acquaintance with Elsie and Bella."

Miss Villars, with a heightened colour, followed him out of the room. The meeting with the old French lady was to her, if possible, a more formidable affair than it would have been to Elsie, and she felt far more unequal to the task of making herself understood in a strange language. Clement would have pitied her if he had known how her limbs trembled, and what an effort it was for her to

follow him into the room where Madame d'Aurigny lay on the sofa in all the grandeur of her flowered dressing-gown; and Ursule, sitting on the window-seat, read aloud in a monotonous voice, which she had proved to be the best way of soothing her in moments of irritation.

She stood quietly by while Madame was making an elaborate little speech to express the pleasure she felt at receiving a visit from Miss Villars. When her own turn came, the latter caught a wistful look as if she was pleading for kindness, and her good heart went out to the girl at once. But she was too shy to express anything; she shook hands with her tremulously, and then Clement asked Ursule to go into the drawing-room and entertain his cousins.

Two pair of eager eyes fastened themselves upon her as she came into the room, perfectly quiet and self-possessed, and ready, with French pliability, to adapt herself to those she came to see, although all the while in the background there was no little curiosity about the details of a life and society to which, even in her own country, she was a stranger. No one, however, could have failed to be daunted by the frigidity of Elsie's manner. It was not any intentional unkindness, in spite of what she had said before Clement, but it was a most unpleasant armour of prickly points which her shyness invariably presented to a stranger, heightened tenfold in the present case by the horror of being obliged to express

herself in a strange language. Poor Ursule, finding an impenetrable barrier of "*Oui*" and "*Non*" the only replies she could elicit, began to wonder whether she was understood at all, whether English young ladies always sucked the handles of their parasols, as Bella was doing now, or whether it was not *comme il faut* to introduce topics of conversation. In spite of Elsie's pretty face, Bella looked the most hopeful of the two, or, at all events, the least inclined to get up and run away; but her utmost endeavours produced very little effect. She found it was of so little use to ask questions when the reply was exhausted in a monosyllable, that in despair she fell back upon a description of their sea-voyage and her own miseries, told in language so sparkling and bright that any one who followed her meaning could not have failed to be amused. But, although Elsie could have understood it well enough had she read it, she was too shy and bewildered to recognize the charm in Ursule's rapid language, and too honest to pretend, like Bella, that she derived any enjoyment from the account. She sat, looking as uncomfortably icy as ever: while Bella, who was anxious to create a favourable impression, smiled and nodded, and even attempted longer answers, speaking correctly enough in all but accent, and encouraged by Ursule's ready perception of her meaning to plunge into bolder depths. Nothing could have been prettier, if Elsie only would have al-

lowed it, than the tact and graciousness of the French manner; but partly a persistent contempt for anything foreign, partly a genuine horror of strangers, prevented her from admiring it, or giving way to the least cordiality. Only a wish to do as Clement desired, just at this time when he had much to trouble him, added to Anne's earnest entreaty that she might be spared the first introduction, induced her to accompany Miss Villars to the Cottage; and now she sat, looking the picture of misery, longing for the time of escape, and presenting no very encouraging prospect to poor Ursule as a specimen of the young English ladies with whom she must look forward to come into contact.

The conversation—if such it could be called—arrived at a depressing pitch. Having exhausted the voyage, there was very little remaining to Ursule. Home and the antipodes might have had more ideas in common than these girls, divided only by a narrow sea-channel and the difference of language. There seemed to be a void of anything to communicate; and Elsie could look nothing but hostile, as if Ursule were an interloper, and consequently an offender of the deepest dye.

Clement took in the position with a rapid and amused glance, when he brought Miss Villars downstairs, and Elsie rose with delight that her penance was at an end. Ursule, on her part, watched with some amazement the girls' unreserved and frank

manner with their cousin, and was grateful to Miss Villars for the kindly way in which she took her hand and tried to frame a little speech of invitation to the Rectory. It was the first word of welcome she had received, and it brought the tears into her eyes. More than anything had this visit depressed her with its realization of all she had heard and read of English stiffness and coldness, and for the twentieth time she wished herself back in the little glazed room to be kissed and scolded by kind old Madame Sanson.

Mr. Blunt walked back to the Rectory with his cousins. Ursule put on her bonnet, and stole out of the house across the fields towards the sea. She thought it would seem like an old friend; but whether it was fancy, or whether the state of the clouds made a difference, certain it was that it looked, as she pronounced it, cold and gloomy, and as unlike as possible to the big, blustering waves of her own Dieppe.

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